Happy Birthday to the number 1 magazine for ZX Spectrum enthusiasts

Issue 5

Rogation Sunday's here again

BREAK SPACE

Sweet Fightin'+2 : Best Fighter Ever?

Go Go BunnyGun : Best Shooter Ever?

PLUS 38 reviews

Awass
Rescue Rocky
Vice City Blues
Liezere
and
many more...

WIN! Games on Tape up for grabs!

QL Special - What Happened?

CronoSoft Profile - Japes with Tapes

Lee Bee speaks, and it's music to our ears!

SBP for MPAGD - SausageSoft's Sonic Screwdriver

Editorial

Back in Issue 2, in our review of Echoes of Atlantis, I mentioned that although I owned the greatest car ever manufactured, it would soon be taken away on grounds of road-worthiness. Sadly, that time has come and gone : the official letter arrived, my mechanic delivered the cost estimate to get the old lady up to scratch, and the inevitable decision was made. I was surprised a little by the genuine sadness that accompanied the decommissioning of the old chariot. Despite its 17 years and 200,000 km, it never let me down once.

Turns out, there are a lot of memories tied up with something that you own for over a decade, and use almost every day. Long drives with the family to theme parks and holiday apartments. Short drives to soft play areas for birthday parties. A seven hour midnight mission to pick up an ailing kid when Covid hit during a school ski trip. We took trips down the country to pick up a pet hamster, then later a puppy, who made the luggage area his own. A lifetime of journeys, really.

So, sure, my new car is technically better in a lot of ways, and it's more efficient and it has a screen and cameras and the Bluetooth works and it plays a little tune if you're about to crash into something. *Better*, sure, but it's just a car, you know?

There's an analogy to the Spectrum here, but I can't quite put my finger on it.

Anyway, Issue 5 of BreakSpace has parked itself in your driveway, and is better than ever. We have some corking game reviews, a potted history of the QL from Jamie, a BASIC type-in that kicked off a bitter high-score contest at HQ, an interview with Tom Potter focusing on his new audio plugin for MPAGD, Shaun's profile of Cronosoft, Sloany's catch-up with Lee Bee and more. We even have, on pages 20 and 21, a Christmas special review section.

On the personnel front, Andy has taken a break this issue, but we have added a formidable mind to the review crew, none other than The Infamous Blood aka Blerkotron aka Lee Tonks, who you'll recognise from last issue's Crap Games piece. Strength in depth, that's what we need.

This issue also marks the start of our second year, which is a milestone of which we can all be proud.Whether you've been reading all along or if this is your first issue, thanks for the support.
Just 16 years left to go, then maybe the government will make me start a Playstation magazine.

Mpk

Cover Notes

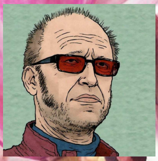
Kev was thrilled when I asked to get some Sweet Fightin'+2 characters on the cover, as he's an old hand at drawing Capcom's roster. But spectacular as Presh's fighting game do-over is, we also had to include the R-Type challenging Go-Go-Bunnygun as fresh IP new to the Speccy in 2026 that redraws the shmup pantheon on the system. And bunny-girls on rockets? Kev did not object to drawing that for a moment.

Want to contribute ?
Simply send us a writing sample, or feature proposal, or *whatever*.
Our email address is **BreakSpaceInbox@gmail.com**

Go on. Do it. It's easy, and fun.

Kung Fu Review Crew

Congratulations, Crew. You finished another issue. Yatta! Now go home and be family men.



Phil has starting work on a game of his own, which he described, in a self-deprecating way, as 'a frivolous, low stakes, vanity publishing project'. If you can imagine such a thing.

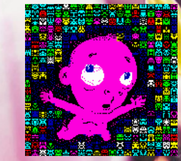
Favourite flower : Maybe it's his age, but he's a Dahlia man, much to his own surprise.

Well! Here comes ol' **Jon!** Good old Jon... yes Sir! Good ol' Jon.
How we hate him.

Favourite flower : Hops - The flowers of Humulus lupulus, because of their rich green hue. Also because you can make Ale out of them.

As the new kid, **Lee** is still being pranked by Shaun and the others, who tell him to get tartan paint or a bucket of steam from the hardware store. He doesn't actually do it, to his credit, but they enjoy it.

Favourite flower : Daffodils, because they're bright and yellow and smell nice and there's always a chance that they might turn out to be Autons.



Dave was a voter on this year's Game of the Year Awards, which announced their winners in February. Don't tell anyone, but he was focused primarily on making sure that Sloany didn't win anything.

Favourite flower : Hydrangeas, because they come in red, yellow, green, and blue. Dave remains the most dedicated of Spec-chums at all times.

Jamie is feeling a little better now, thanks for asking, everyone. So, ladies, if you could stop camping on his lawn, that'd be great. They're only so many candlelight vigils his neighbours can take.

Favourite flower : Orchids, because they're so weird and alien. Hope there for any weird, alien-looking ladies reading.

Shaun missed Issue 1, and has been excitedly waiting for Issue 5 to complete as Lee convinced him that there was a cash bonus for a full one year. The prankster, I regret to inform him, has been pranked.

Favourite flower : Shaun always liked Snowdrops because they were a sign of Spring. Still are, I suppose.

Sloany has been getting more into his Ace Reporter persona since we let him out to talk about Football Manager last time. By which I mean he's bought a trilby and talks too fast.

Favourite flower : Engineer Thomas Flowers, who designed and built designed and built Colossus, the world's first programmable electronic computer. Sloany, you absolute nerd.

Mpk just got the winter heating bill for the towers. The Crew are informed to start bringing in firewood now, to ensure survival next year. That boiler is going on E-bay.

Favourite flower : During hay-fever season, they are all The Enemy.

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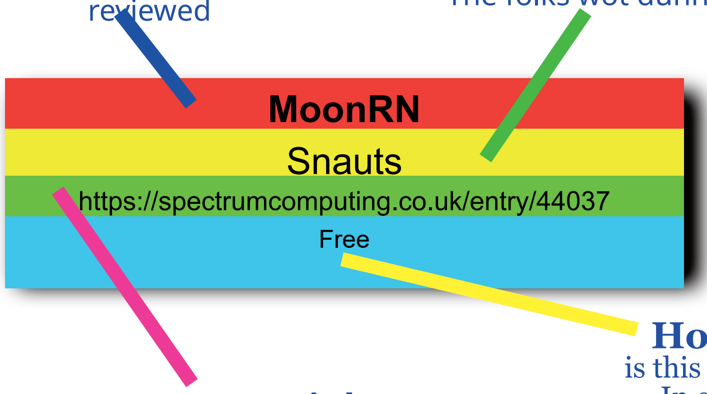
Review Header Explained

So, we have this colourful box at the top of every review. Just in case there's any confusion, here's what it all means.

The name
of the game being reviewed

Publisher / Author
The folks wot dunnit



How Much
is this going to cost?
In cases where there's a suggested but not compulsory Pay What You Want option, we list it as PWYW / £suggested

A Link
to the game's entry on SpectrumComputing.co.uk
You'll find lots of data there, all sourced from the mighty ZXDB.
Sometimes the games are available to download directly from SC, but generally there will be a link to itch.io or wherever under the 'Related Links' section.

Review Policy

We cover each game on its own merits, and look for the positives. The majority of the games here are hobby projects. It would not be fair or useful to review such projects harshly.

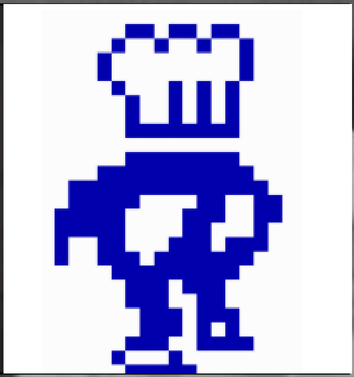
Each game will be reviewed by at least 2 reviewers, and given a fair assessment in its own context.

We don't award scores, but we do grant the coveted Break Space ACE award to the most deserving titles. The 2026 Game of the Year contest starts now.

The Haps

Great events are taking place that will shape the future, and also there's some news about the ZX Spectrum.

Crap Judged



It took until February, but the 2025 CSSCGC finally came to a halt with a clear winner : *Computer Entertainment 1985 Arcade Trivia Review Simulator* and a clear loser : *Infecto* by ZXKerl, who now has to host the 2026 contest. You should enter, and punish him with your incompetence.

Crap Games Contest 2026

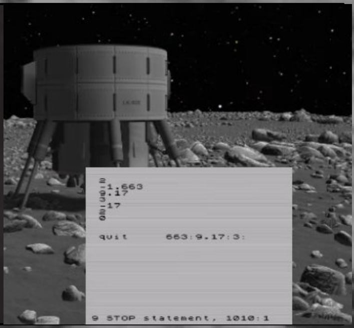
Wonder Expanded

EXPANSION PACK

The top class documentary movie The Rubber Keyed Wonder is getting an expansion, including extra interviews and features. The Kickstarter is over, but you can still order a copy from the site.

Kickstarter

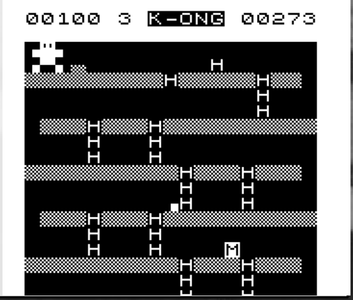
Moon Landed Upon



Alright, bit weird this one. Someone used a Spectrum to land a spaceship on the moon in Kerbal Space Program. Not real life. But it's a compelling proof-of-concept and we look forward to the real thing.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XQTh1Davsj8

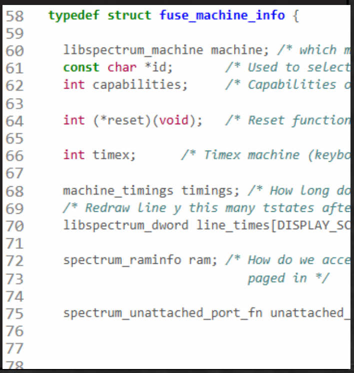
Ape released



There's prolific, and there's *prolific*. The aptly-named ZX81Coder has released his 152nd (that's One Hundred and Fifty Second) ZX81 game, and it's a cracker : a sub 1kb Donkey Kong, named K-ONG. M is for Mario!

https://zx81coder.itch.io/k-ong

Fuse replaced



```
typedef struct fuse_machine_info {

  libspectrum_machine machine; /* which m
  const char *id;       /* Used to select
  int capabilities;     /* Capabilities o

  int (*reset)(void);   /* Reset function

  int timex;      /* Timex machine (keybo

  machine_timings timings; /* How long do
  /* Redraw line y this many tstates afte
  libspectrum_dword line_times[DISPLAY_SC

  spectrum_raminfo ram; /* How do we acce
                          paged in */

  spectrum_unattached_port_fn unattached_
```

Fuse is one of the workhorses of the Spectrum scene, a solid, multipurpose emulator for Unix, Mac OSX and Windows. It hadn't had an update since 2021 though, so we all celebrated the late March release of 1.7.0.
Added features include Currah Microspeech support.

https://sourceforge.net/projects/fuse-emulator/

Yet more Snake detected

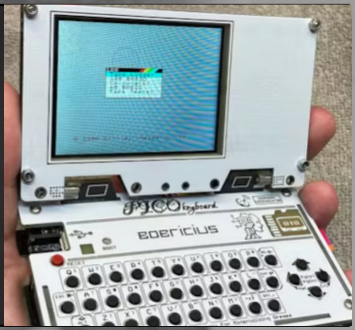
We are ever in the shadow of Snake games here at Break Space Towers. They seem like the only constant, and we live our lives one Snake at a time. The James Webb telescope recently added a hint of cosmic horror to this grim agenda, spotting a 'chain' of 20 galaxies, 13 million light years across. Boffins named it the Cosmic Vine, but we know a Snake game when we see one.

https://science.nasa.gov/mission/webb/

Pockets filled

Fancy a weird flip-screen Spectrum emulator for just $199 ?
Check out this PICOmputer.
Why isn't the screen in the middle though?

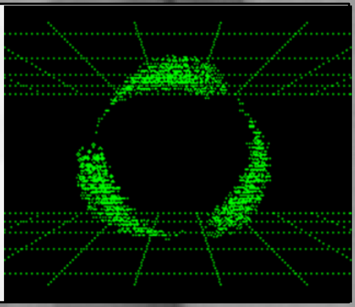
https://www.tindie.com/products/bobricius


PICO keyboard
BOBRICIUS

Demo demoed

There was a big win for the Speccy at the Revision 2026 demoscene event, with 'In 3D' taking a deserved win in the Oldskool 4k Intro category, despite strong competition. You can check it out on Youtube below.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J7PLG9XZ_oY



ZX81 Guided

Shaun McClure (no relation to Troy) and Hilary Wells (No relation to Tunbridge) have just published a guide to ZX81 games. A7 779 pages, it's bound to be comprehensive. Only commercial era games though - it won't feature K-ONG.

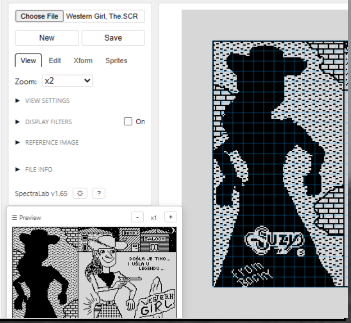
https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/B0GWQ4DTKZ

sinclair
ZX81

Images Viewed

SpectraLab is a new Viewer and Editor for Spectrum graphics formats. It can handle images, animations and sprites, with tabbed multi-image editing. A really useful tool, running in the browser.

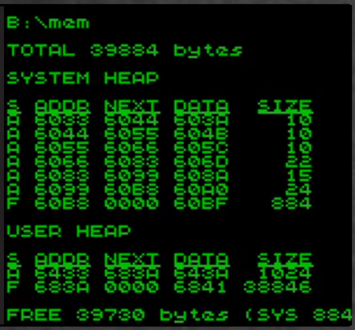
https://github.com/Bedazzle/SpectraLab


Choose File
Western Girl, The.SCR
New
Save
View
Edit
Xform
Sprites
Zoom: x2
VIEW SETTINGS
DISPLAY FILTERS
☐ On
REFERENCE IMAGE
FILE INFO
SpectraLab v1.65
?
Preview
-
x1
+
BANK
SALOON
DOŠLA JE TIHO... I UŠLA U LEGENDU ...
WESTERN GIRL
Suzy
from Bucky

Tasks Paralleled

One for the real nerds here : YOS is a ROM-replacing Operating System for the Spectrum, designed for proper multitasking. It comes with a C compiler, built in Microdrive support and there's a GUI coming soon. Ambitious!

https://github.com/retro-vault/xyz/tree/main/src/yos



```
B:\mem
TOTAL 39884 bytes
SYSTEM HEAP
S ADDR NEXT DATA  SIZE
A 6033 6044 603A    10
A 6044 6055 604B    10
A 6055 6066 605C    10
A 6066 6083 606D    22
A 6083 6099 608A    15
A 6099 60B8 60A0    24
F 60B8 0000 60BF   884
USER HEAP
S ADDR NEXT DATA  SIZE
A 6433 683A 643A  1024
F 683A 0000 6841 38846
FREE 39730 bytes (SYS 884
```

Go Go BunnyGun

Ionian Games

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/34612

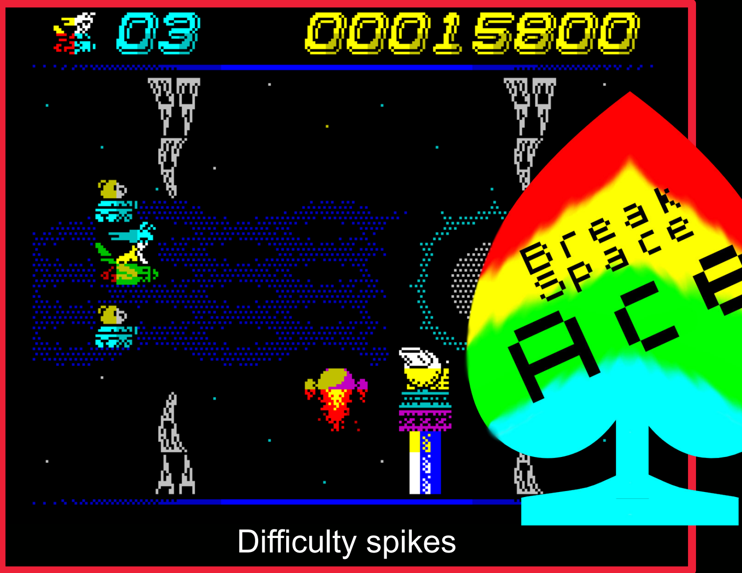
PWYW / $6

Gun rabbit gun rabbit gun gun gun, as cockney geezers Chas N Dave once nearly sang.

If you are reading this, then there's a fair chance you have an interest in modern ZX Spectrum games and if that's the case you may already be aware of this one - it's caused quite the ripple in the Speccy community. For the uninitiated, GoGoBunnygun (GGB) is a colourful horizontal scrolling shooter from Jason Railton, where you assume the role of one of three Bunnygun pilots tasked with thwarting the Elil-Hrair's evil plans to attack Earth.

And what a game it is. There's so much to love about GGB. The graphics are really well drawn, with an absolute riot of colour and clever techniques to ensure attribute clash is barely a feature. The enemies look great and have sensible attack patterns (with only a few "memory test" bits). I'm a particular fan of the waves at the start of the 2nd level where they take one shot to retreat and a second one to blast them out of the stars. The parallax scrolling is up with the best of them and there's barely any slowdown even when the screen is teeming with bullets and baddies. Everything pops in this game. There are even Watership Down references for Frith's sake!

Of course this would be utterly meaningless if the gameplay wasn't up to snuff, but it's just so much fun to play. The scourge of shoot em ups for me, especially on the Speccy, is when they have barely visible bullets. The "what killed me?" factor can ruin even the best shooters. GGB's enemies and bullets however are nice and clear and we all know deaths are easier to accept when they are "user error". The difficulty is pitched just right too, with 2 difficulty modes, and the game completeable by most in the easier level at least.



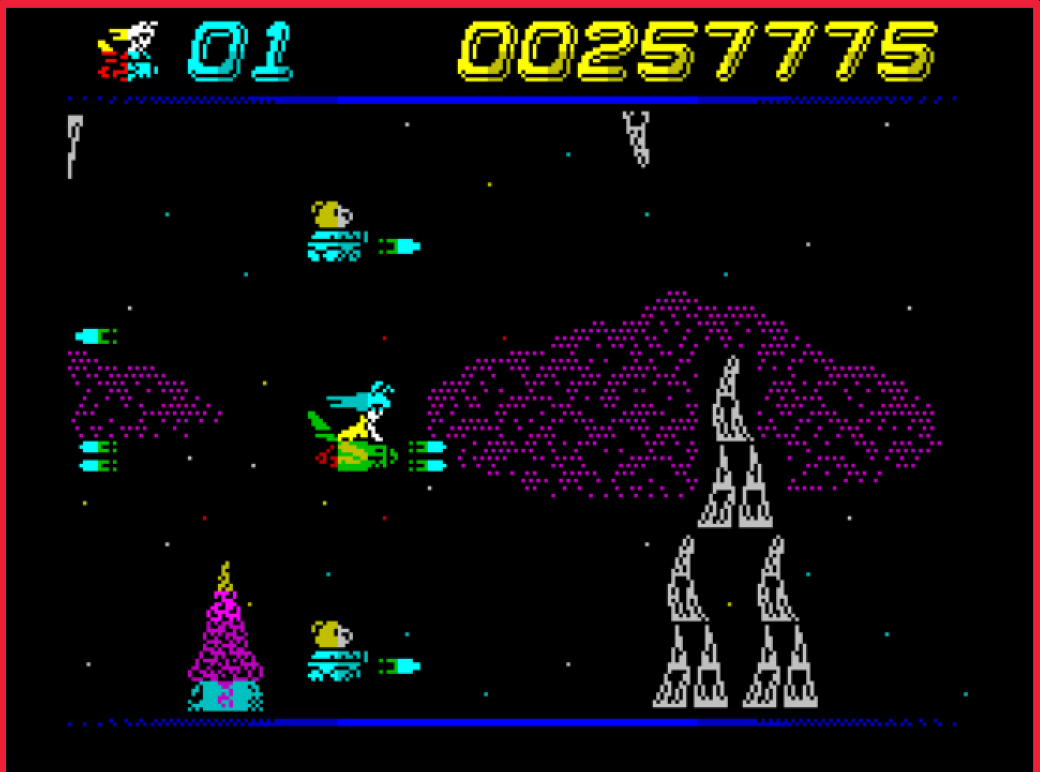
Difficulty spikes

The game has a unique power up system, allowing you to swap between the 3 protagonists. Depending on which colour heart you collect, further hearts of that colour will power up your weaponry, but if you collect a different colour you change character and it's back to square one. Holding down fire flips your character into reverse, allowing you to blast the nasties that have the cheek to attack you from behind. It does mean that auto-fire doesn't quite work in the traditional way, so you may be giving your trigger finger a bit more of a workout, at least until your character is beefed up a bit and even your reverse fire is formidable.

One thing you may notice is the absence of is an AY tune, that's because this entire package is somehow squeezed into the 48k restraint of a stock 1982 ZX Spectrum. That's right - this will run on the very machine that gave us *Horace and the Spiders* and *Mrs Mopp*. For this reason, I had to dig out my old rubber-keyed machine for the first time since my Next arrived and yes, it runs like a dream. So while there's no in-game tune, I did what I did back in the day and stuck on an 80s playlist and when I did, my score began to improve dramatically. Go figure!

I've been following the progress of this one since Jason first posted about it and had the pleasure of seeing a demo running at Crash Live. I'd a very nice chat about the obstacles he had to overcome and the clever tricks and techniques he used to create such an impressive game. I'll be honest, I barely understood the half of it but I absolutely loved hearing it!

Go Go Bunnygun is one of the most exceptional shoot em ups to have ever graced the ZX Spectrum. Hyperbole? Possibly, but spending time playing this one leaves you thinking you've played something really special indeed. I find it difficult to describe this game without making reference to R-Type. However to my mind GGB eclipses even Bob Pape's classic and I don't say that lightly. Enough rabbit rabbit from me, suffice to say the hype for this one is fully warren-ted.



Rolling with the homies

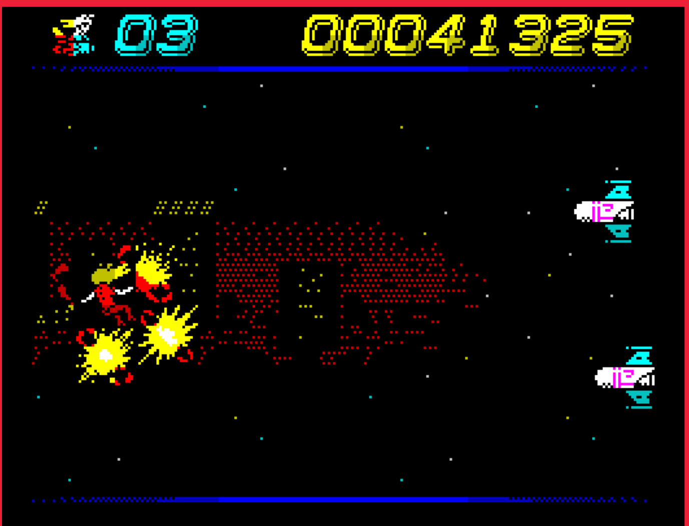
Go-Go Bunny Gun stars a selection of bunny-eared heroines, piloting stylised, phallic rockets to take on swarm after swarm of Japanese-inspired enemy types. Are there angry bees? Yes. Weird attack mechs? Naturally. Giant space nautiluses? You better believe it, buddy.

At its heart, Go-Go Bunny Gun is a masterful fusion of legendary inspirations. It combines the meticulous, groundbreaking technical design of Bob Pape's R-Type port with the vibrant, chaotic artistry of Japanese gems like Cotton, Gradius, and Darius.

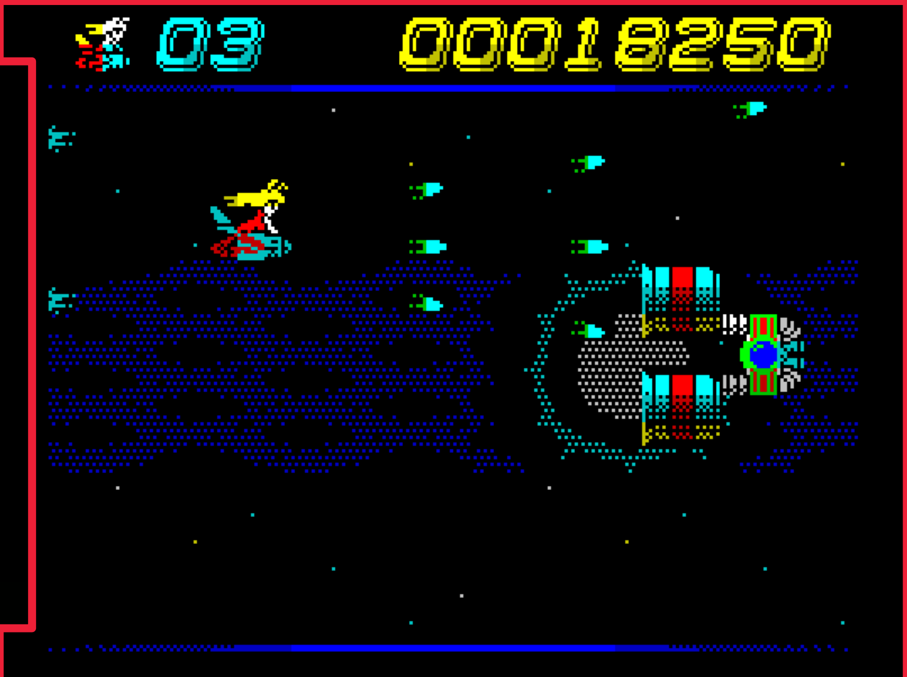
The R-Type legacy is most evident in its brilliant display technique. The game employs a multi-layered parallax scroll where the background moves per-pixel, while the foreground (the attribute level) shifts every eight pixels. This clever trick seemingly defies Spectrum limitations, delivering surprisingly smooth scrolling and allowing for large, colourful sprites without colour-clash chaos. For anyone who witnessed Pape's technical wizardry in the 80s, seeing this effect so beautifully replicated in a home-brew title is truly impressive.

And what wonders there are to see. The game's artistic ambitions soar as it progresses. One moment you're facing a mid-stage Bee Queen boss that wouldn't look out of place in a modern Cave shooter; the next, you're navigating a cityscape battling fish-like foes straight out of Darius. The two-way shooting and charismatic bunny avatars suggest a deep love for Battle Mania Daiginjou, while the candy-like collection of power-ups is a sweet nod to Cotton.

My verdict? Can you tell I love it yet? Go-Go Bunny Gun takes the best of classic Japanese shoot 'em ups and distils it through a distinctly Spectrum lens. It elevates a deeply audacious concept with technical prowess, artistic flair, and, most importantly, incredibly fun and tight gameplay. It's a brilliant, joyful blast that has earned itself an ACE in my heart.



It came outta nowhere, officer



You're not the boss of me.

Go Go Bunnygun is a sideways scrolling shoot-em-up which is fast, frantic and contains a lot of sprites on the screen all seeming not to care about fripperies like the memory management and processing limitations of the humble Speccy. It laughs in the face of clock cycles and chuckles in the visage of colour clash. Mwa-hah-har!

Now I'm not real sure at this point if the Bunny is the girl rider, or the flying gun they are riding like a space going jet ski. Either way if you have played R-Type or Pulstar or it's bro Blazing Star on NeoGeo (ptui!!) or any of the other clones out there in the world, you'll know the drill. Fly sideways, avoid or shoot the snaking lines of incoming enemies, shoot the bonus objects and catch those bonuses, all without being shot in the face or bumping into anything dangerous. In other words an average Saturday night out.

Starting the game you have a choice of QAOP or joystick. Either is good, but obviously you have less stress and RSI playing with a stick. Next you get to choose your Bunnygun. There's a phrase I didn't think I'd say today. You have a choice between Amy, Heidi and Miya, which boils down to hair colour choice. Except I hear it relates to unique firing and alternate-firing systems. You see if you hold down fire instead of tapping it, you fire backwards - very useful in case any of the gribblies get behind you.

The first thing you notice playing this game is what an impressive feat of programming it is. The colour clash on the larger than usual sprites is exquisitely managed, leaving you the impression that large multi colour sprites must be easy. It isn't. Also it's very smooth and the waves of enemies are numerous and challenging without any apparent slowdown when the screen is full of enemies and bullets and stuff.

The quality of the game means you only have to concentrate on one thing. Surviving. You do this by gaining knowledge of the attack patterns, having a keen awareness of what comes next. And doing this all the time while shooting the little bonus objects and catching the bonuses they fling you.

Now then I can't say for sure but apparently the "enemies vary their attack pattern" a little as you go making it challenging even if you know what they did last time… Not sure the varying of the attack pattern is a feature I like as learning the attack patterns is a well worn strategy in this type of game.

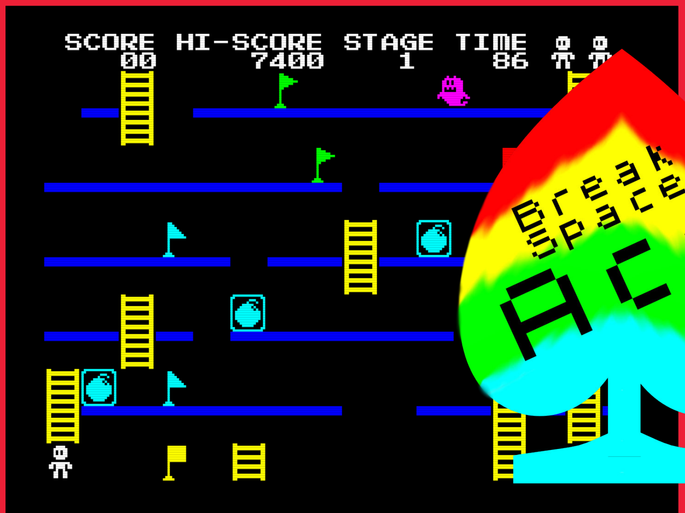
That said, it is enjoyable. It's a triumph and best R-Type style arcade game I've seen on Speccy for a longish while.

AWASS

Inufuto

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45199

Free



Party like it's 1981

Inufuto is, I suspect, a robot. Or an alien. Maybe a time traveller. What I'm really getting at is that it seems really, really unlikely that he could be a regular human being.

In the last six years or so, Inufuto has created and released 21 games. "Quite prolific", I hear you say, "but that hardly makes him a Terminator." And I would agree. What he has also done, however, is release each of those 21 games for over 100 retro platforms. I didn't even know there were that many platforms. And these aren't simple text-based puzzles or adventure games - these are arcade games, with sprites and music and everything.

Let's just say I am in awe and move on.

Awass is a single-screen platforms and ladders game where your little guy's task is to collect all of the flags in order to move on to the next level. Flags come in coloured pairs, and bonus points can be earned by collecting both flags of the same colour before picking up a different-coloured one. Floaty ghost baddies patrol the level trying to kill you, increasing in number as you make progress, and you have 90 seconds to clear each screen before you lose a life.

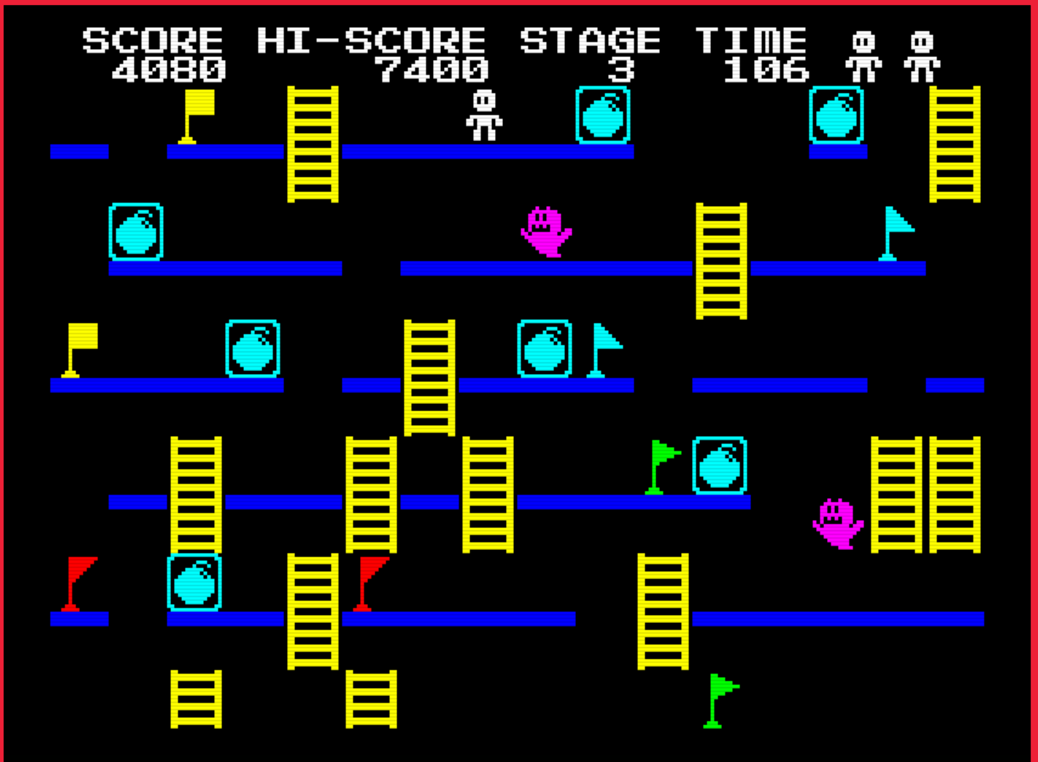
What makes this game somewhat unique is how the platforms and ladders work. Ladders are often broken up and don't take you anywhere, but hitting the fire button scrolls the floor beneath you (in the opposite direction to your last movement), shifting the ladders and holes (and the bombs, more on those in a minute) left or right. Things that disappear off one side of the screen reappear on the opposite side, so by careful manipulation of the floor you can join ladder pieces together and reach higher areas, or move a hole into a handy spot and fall down quickly - think Jumping Jack, but you're in control of the floor.

Complicating things a bit are the aforementioned bombs; you cannot move through these, so must work your way around them by climbing up to a higher level. They're not entirely useless, however - if you happen to end up on the same level as one of the attacking ghosts, you can scroll a bomb into them and kill them, making your life a little easier.

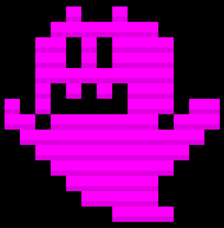
I'm a sucker for single-screen arcade platformers, so needless to say I really like this game. It looks, plays and sounds like a lost arcade cabinet from the early 80s, the difficulty is pitched just right, and the levels are well designed and fun to figure out, especially if you're going for those bonus points. It is fairly simple, so may not hold everyone's attention for very long, but it's perfectly suited for a quick blast when you have five minutes spare, or a high-score challenge with your chums.

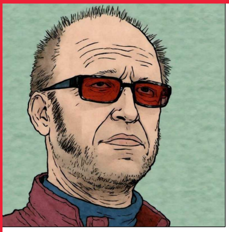
This is a fine, fine game that I continue to play. There are a few minor niggles, however. Sprite movement is a little jerky (disappointingly so looking at videos of some of the other versions, although I suspect those platforms have hardware sprites), the jolly AY tune which plays throughout on 128k machines is nice enough but very short, so it gets old quite quickly, and there's no real variety between levels other than a changing layout.

All that said, however, I think it's smashing, and I think you will too. I'm going to have another go right now, in fact.



It's a Health and Safety Nightmare





I mean we've all been there, eh? Adrift in a world of disjointed floating ladders, trying to climb out of a room collecting flags while being chased by ghosts. Although your one advantage is you can, in this psychedelic cheese dream, move ladder segments with your mind. Pretty neat eh? And as with all of these lactose infused nightmares the ghosts always seem to be getting closer and closer with every step.

Brr.

I didn't quite know what to make of AWASS at first. It's a baffling game to look at, resembling nothing more than a naffed up game of ghosts and ladders. I mean I like a game of ghosts and ladders as much as the next guy, but this quite took me by surprise.

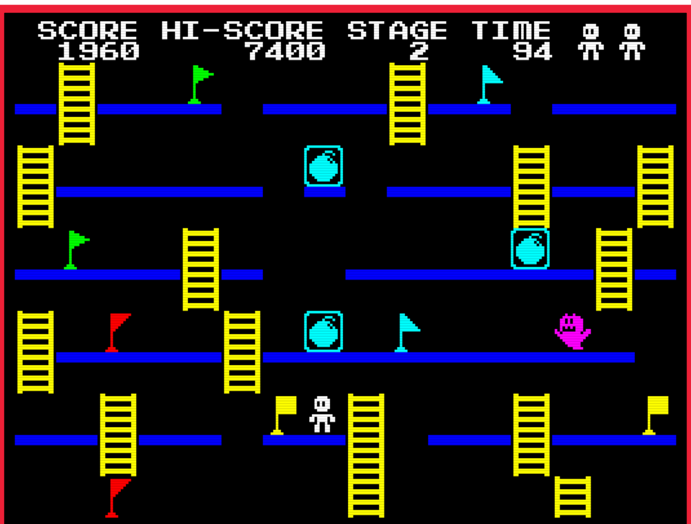
I'm sure many people would immediately get it, but it's a fiddle to get to grips with. The game, made by lyrically monikered Inufuto, seems to work by shifting segments of the ladder on the level you are on sideways so they match the ladders above you, meaning you can ascend.

This seems simple enough but initially I spent a few turns barging into it like I knew what I was doing only to shift the ladders under my feet and drop right onto the head of a chasing ghost. Instead of collecting all the flags, all I collected was shame.

It's a delightfully programmed piece, with colourful sprites and really fun, engaging sound effects and musical tinkles. I did feel a bit like I was rubbing my tummy and patting my head while I was playing though. It takes a while to get the muscle memory going, and during that process you are ghost food a lot more times than you'd like.

I'd like to know why it's called AWASS though. Is that made clear anywhere? And why is it always CAPITAL LETTERS? Looks like an acronym. "A Wild Ascent Sans Steps" perhaps? "A Wild Ass Steppy Sprint"? Answers on a postcard.

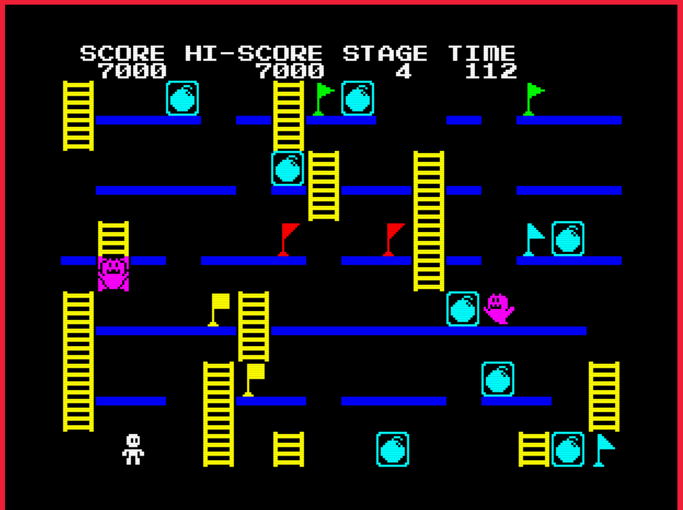
I'm fairly sure this is not a mechanism I've seen before, although doubtless as soon as this piece is printed and read I'll be belaboured by hordes of people telling me this is a well known game type. (It's true, Snout has a memory like a retired goldfish. Ed.) Anyway regardless of my fragrant brain farts I think AWASS is a nice original take on the platform ladder game, and quite hard too, which I like.



Getting my steps in

For me it feels like a really amped up surreal style of a Burger Time type game, where you can move the ladders and all the spooky animated foodstuffs are transformed into undead ghouls.

Wow - when you put it like that it sounds kinda fun.



Fred Dibnah would love this

A-ha! I see Phil is caught in the same dilemma that I had with Inufuto's Mieyen back in Issue 1. Is this a brand new mechanic, or has it just passed us by? If nothing else, I'm glad it's not just me who's confused. For what it's worth, I've not seen this either. I can't shake the feeling that if Inufuto was churning out these fresh ideas with this regularity in the 80s, there'd be a golden statue of him on Tokyo harbour by now and a terrible Ghost Cat movie in theatres for the Easter half-terms.

But maybe it's for the best that he's producing his little gems for the wide, wide world of micros. I get a little excited whenever I see a new game with those signature ghosts pop up. They're such friendly little guys, I can't get mad when they get me. And get me they do.

This one's tricky, despite its slower pace. Each level requires a little forward planning. It's all too easy to trap yourself in a corner, or move a floor the wrong way and drop yourself through a hole. But that just means that for each level you get to puzzle out your optimum path, which is the whole point of a game like this. It's really rather splendid.

If I had to complain about anything, and that's kind of my job here, I'd say that the controls required for moving the platforms should really have separate buttons for left and right. As it stands it depends which way you're facing, and it's s bit fiddly. Yes, I know that standard Kempstons etc. have only 1 button, but it's 2026 and we're all playing on emulators and things with, like, PS5 pads plugged in. We've got the buttons, and should no longer be beholden to whatever fool decided that one button would be enough.

But that's a churlish and unfair complaint, and not specific to AWASS. So - this is another cracker from the mysterious Inufuto. It looks exactly like a dozen of his other titles, sure, but it plays entirely its own way. Like I said - splendid.

And the Bee-t Goes on

If you've found yourself humming a Spectrum game tune recently, there's a good chance that it was the work of Lee Bee, who has audio credits on 26 Spectrum games since 2021

Sloany got out his notepad and tuning fork and paid the maestro a visit. Over to you, Dave.

When I was a kid with my 48k Spectrum, in-game music wasn't a big thing for me. Sure, there were some clever tricks used by skilled programmers to get the best out of the beeper, but I tended to eschew its farty noises in favour of listening to chart hits on the radio while playing my Speccy favourites.

That was until I first played Auf Wiedersen Monty on my new +2. Having multi-channel in-game music was an absolute revelation and brought a new layer of atmosphere to the gameplay experience.

Fast forward a few decades and skilled musicians are still at it, creating toe tapping bangers and adrenaline pumping beats to accompany our gameplay. One such artist who has been making big waves on the Speccy scene in recent years is the hugely talented and prolific Lee Bee.

Lee has been, dare I say it, a rather busy Bee, having generously composed music which has been a perfect fit for many of the games we have reviewed here at Break Space towers. On a personal level the tunes he has created for Sloanysoft titles have really elevated our games. So what makes the award-winning virtuoso tick? Let's find out.

David Sloan : Taking it back to the beginning, how did you first encounter the ZX Spectrum?

Lee Bee : It all started for me when my family moved to the seaside in the mid 80s. This was my introduction to the magical world of amusement arcades, where I developed a serious Paperboy addiction. Santa must have got word of this, as come Christmas 1986, he'd kindly filled my stocking with a copy of Paperboy for the Spectrum (plus a Spectrum +2 pack from Dixons, which came in handy).

I wish I could say I immediately fell in love with the Speccy, but the reality is I was quite disappointed by the monochrome graphics, initially thinking my computer was broken!

Lee ensuring he gets plenty of Vitamins C through B

It did ultimately turn out to be a love story, though quite a slow one, with one of those sad bits in the middle where we went our separate ways, before ultimately realising we couldn't live without each other!

DS : You've clearly got an ear for music. How & when did you first start composing music for games?

LB : I began tinkering with AY music (and BASIC games) in the late 80s. At age 13, I made the title sequence and opening music for a game I'd planned out called "Pac-Man's Holiday". By the age of 14 I was making some fairly slick compositions, as well as creating my own Spectrum paint package (inspired by Deluxe Paint on the Amiga).

DS : That sounds incredible! You clearly have a passion for game design that isn't just about the music. When did you move on from the Spectrum?

LB : In the 90s, I moved over to the Amiga and made a large amount of tracker music, dabbling with the demoscene, but this was mostly all just for my own amusement and nothing ever ended up in a game.

I've always loved designing games and made several small games on the Amiga, though only for my own amusement. In 1998, I spent months working on a near-complete Amiga clone of Puzzle Bobble, but got a little stuck with the code at one point and it never got finished.

DS : It's a shame that one didn't get finished, it's always been a favourite of mine. Where did you go from

there?

LB : The 2000s was a completely unusual period in my life when I forwent games entirely and committed all my time to my vibrant social life, career, love interests, performing and gigging. For many years, I was rarely at home in the evening.

That was to change again in the 2010s when I entered a much more mature phase of my life, giving up all the thrill-seeking to become much more contemplative, seeking after God and studying the Bible. This is the period when the Speccy started calling me back, and like the Prodigal Son I returned, with a growing passion for the Spectrum's graphics and colours, and then in 2016 I got seriously into making AY music.

DS : Interesting. Was there a specific game or event that brought you back to the fold or was it something that happened gradually?

LB : I'm not actually a big player of games. I prefer making them or watching others play (freeing up my brain to do what it enjoys most: creative daydreaming). I became quite socially reclusive throughout the 2010s, and my only connection to the Speccy scene was watching hundreds of walkthrough videos, uploaded by the sadly-missed Daren Pearcy. His YouTube channel became my favourite way to relax, giving me my fix of classic nostalgia, while keeping me up-to-date on the amazing new titles coming out.

The idea of actually getting my music into games was always just a dream, but this past couple of years, that dream has come true, and now I don't want it to stop! I love making soundtracks and want to do as many as I possibly can!

DS : We are certainly reaping the benefits of your productivity. What are your main musical influences?

LB : I'm not too keen on the word "influences", since I try to innovate, not imitate. The truth is I've never really been a "fan" of any particular act. I love variety, and my music collection has mostly consisted of compilation albums from an eclectic range of genres.

The closest thing I have to a music hero is perhaps pop producer Brian Higgins, who wrote most of the big girl group hits of the noughties (And, notably, Cher's *Believe* - Ed). I also have a tremendous respect for the guys who write TV theme tunes. Two of my favourites are Ed Welch (Knightmare, Catchphrase, Blockbusters) and 80s cartoon legend Shuki Levy.

CHER
believe

Beeper purist Cher, yesterday.

DS : The Ulysses and Mysterious Cities of Gold guy! Excellent shout.

LB : Yeah, my absolute favourite soundtrack is Inspector Gadget, but he did so many!

DS : What about gaming soundtracks?

LB : Mario composer Koji Kondo is great, isn't he! 8-bit-wise, Tim Follin has always been my favourite. Then there's Ben Daglish, and of course the legend that is David Whittaker (from the same town as my dad: Bury). Along with Allister Brimble and Lyndon Sharp, you could say these men wrote the soundtrack to my childhood. Love them all!

DS : What is the biggest challenge when composing a tune for the Speccy?

LB : Cramming everything into three sound channels, then cramming a soundtrack down into a few kB of space. Plus, finding ways to make instruments sound a bit different!

DS : Well you certainly seem to be overcoming those obstacles. What work are you most proud of?

LB : "Proud" isn't quite the right word; I am just very thankful for everything my Heavenly Father has given me, including the privilege to be able to work on so many great games. Every soundtrack I've done is special to me, and I'm so grateful to have had so many opportunities.

If I had to pick one—almost randomly—I might just say "Dr Acula", as it was a huge honour to be part of that project. It's one of my more extensive soundtracks (9 tunes), a spooky game (my favourite type), and I managed to simulate an organ sound for when Dracula wakes up. Above all else, I just really dig those tunes, the hidden gem being "game complete", which is really special to me. I find it deep, poignant, and comforting in a way I can't really describe. It loops after only one minute, but I could let it loop forever!

DS : It's an amazing tune, and it's great that you were able to provide the music for a Speccy coding legend. So what's next on the agenda?

LB : I have so much in store for the future. More soundtracks, for sure, and I've got big plans for my YouTube channel which I want to be the home of all my music."

I'd also love to actually start creating my own games, which I have dozens of ideas for, in particular an epic multi-game franchise. I also have a huge game-related project I've been working on for years (though can't go into details yet).

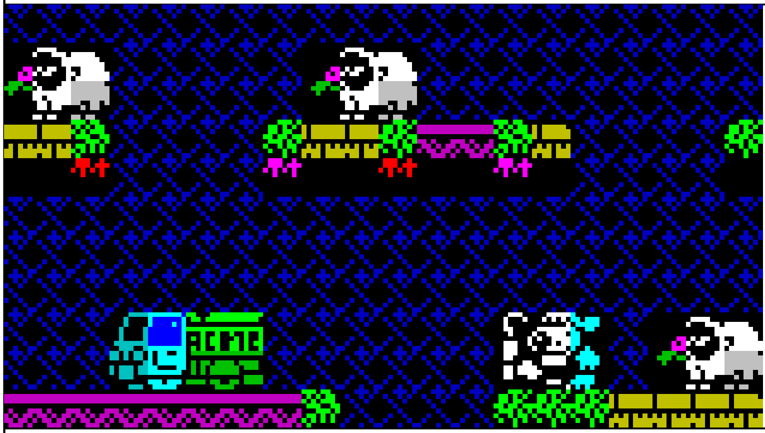
Then beyond games, I'd love to seriously get into producing "real" music, music videos, and filmmaking, all of which I have a real passion for. Watch this space, folks!

DS : Well I for one can't wait to hear what comes next, thanks so much for your time Lee and good luck with all your future projects!

You can keep up to date with Lee's work through his brand new YouTube channel, which he assures me will be up and running with content in the very near future: www.youtube.com/@LeeBeeMusic

Top of Lee Pops

We know Lee has been extremely prolific of late, here's just a sample of some of the games he has worked on.



Sheepish

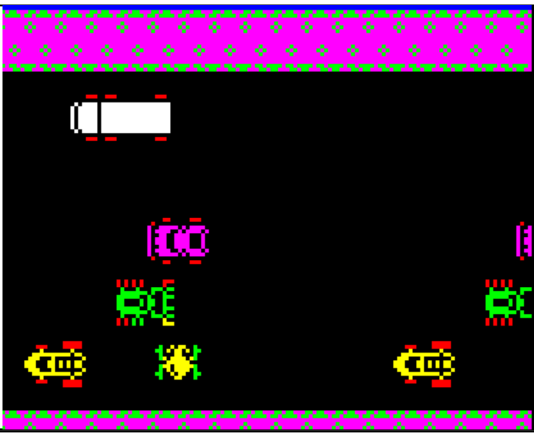
Lee enhanced Gabriele Amore's colourful platformer with a variety of great tunes including a superb rendition of 80's new wave classic "Hungry Like the Wolf" and some hilarious "baaa" noises on the title screen

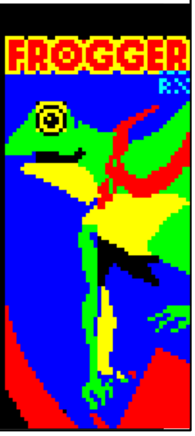
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/43030/

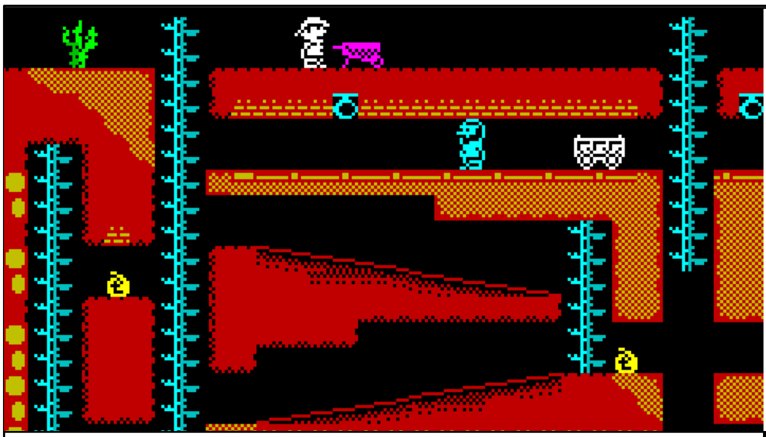
Frogger RX

A top tier conversion that aims for "arcade perfection" needs to replicate its music, right? Well, Lee did a bang up job on our Issue 2 cover star, recreating over 20 different tunes from the original.

https://happycodingzx.itch.io/frogger-rx







Gilligan's Mine

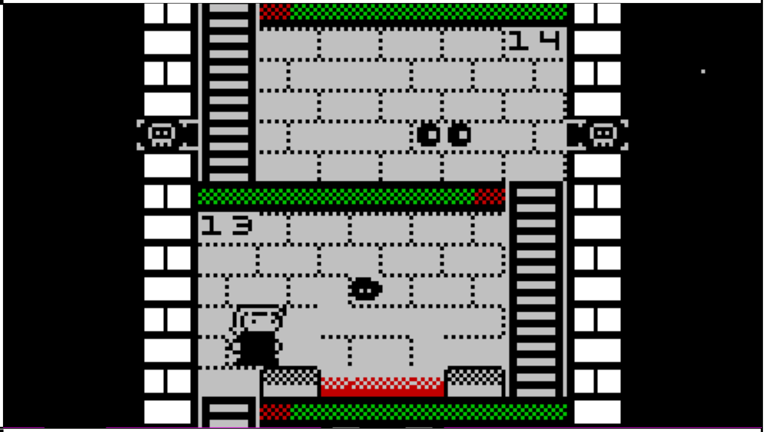
Lee provided some amazing tunes for this impressive Bagman/Gilligan's Mine rework. It's a tricky game but really worth trying to get to the later levels that have some absolute toe tappers.

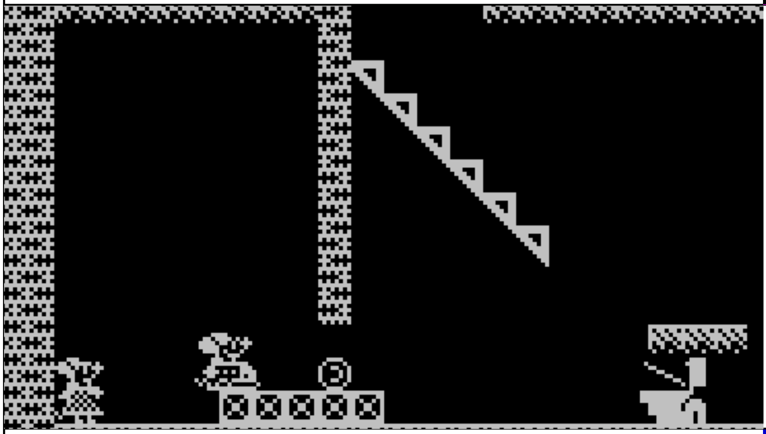
https://clebingames.itch.io/gilligans-mine

Magic Tower

This one may have gone under the radar, but it is a really charming platformer and Lee provided a suitable nice little tune to go along with it.

https://seagal112.itch.io/magic-tower





Sloany's Steamboat Games

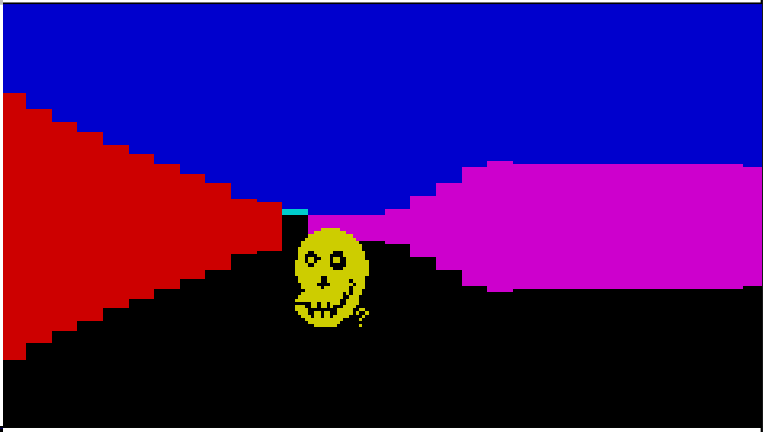
It feels self indulgent putting my own games here but I'll be forever grateful for the incredible lift Lee's award winning music game my silly little platformers. I love the Christmas/flying musical mash ups on Plane Lazy and the way he worked the Speccy loading noises into the Darkside version was some next level genius.

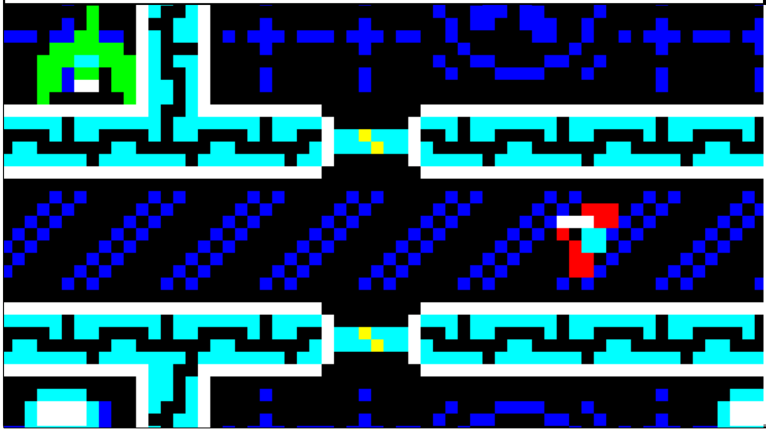
https://sloanysoft.itch.io/willie

World of Spells

A groundbreaking FPS needs a groundbreaking soundtrack and Lee's work on this one really fits the bill.

https://jtpl.itch.io/world-of-spells





Alien Breed (Demo)

Fresh off the production line, Lee has not only produced some great music for this colourful playable demo of the classic Amiga game demake, but there are impressive AY sound effects galore in this colourful and very promising preview.

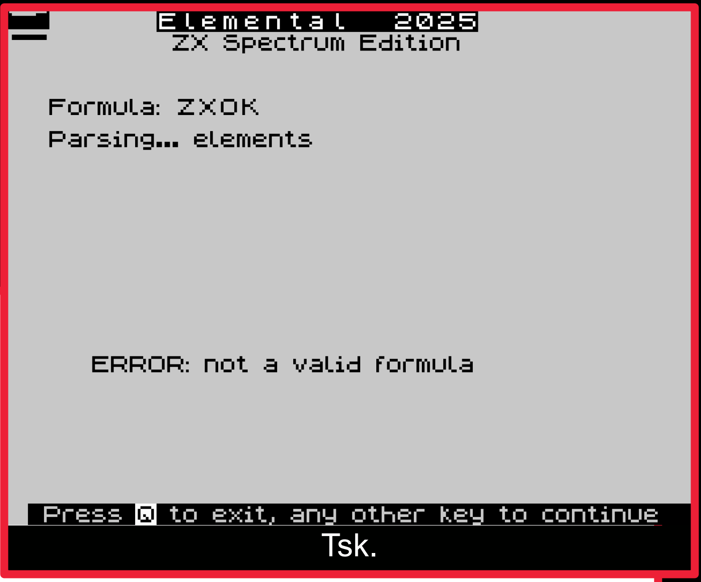
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/forums/viewtopic.php?t=15080

Elemental 2025

Massimiliano Arca

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/43671

Free



```
Elemental 2025
ZX Spectrum Edition

Formula: ZXOK
Parsing... elements

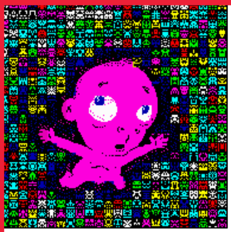


ERROR: not a valid formula



Press Q to exit, any other key to continue
```

Tsk.



Finally! A copper-bottomed reason to have a Spectrum emulator on my work computer. Previous excuses were starting to wear very thin: Manic Miner? Well, it's the industrial standard method for testing frame rate. Splat!? It's an interactive screensaver. Sam Fox Strip Poker? PASS ME MY TROUSERS COLONEL I'M HAVING A NERVOUS BREAKDOWN.

Elemental 2025 is a utility for calculating the % composition of a substance based on its chemical formula. This could have been useful to any reader that did chemistry in their later school years and beyond. I fall into the 'beyond' category for, while I'm not a pure chemist, it covers exactly what part of my job entails. I run samples on an Elemental Analyser to measure their composition, and if you compare that to the theoretical values that Elemental 2025 provides, you can tell how pure that substance is.

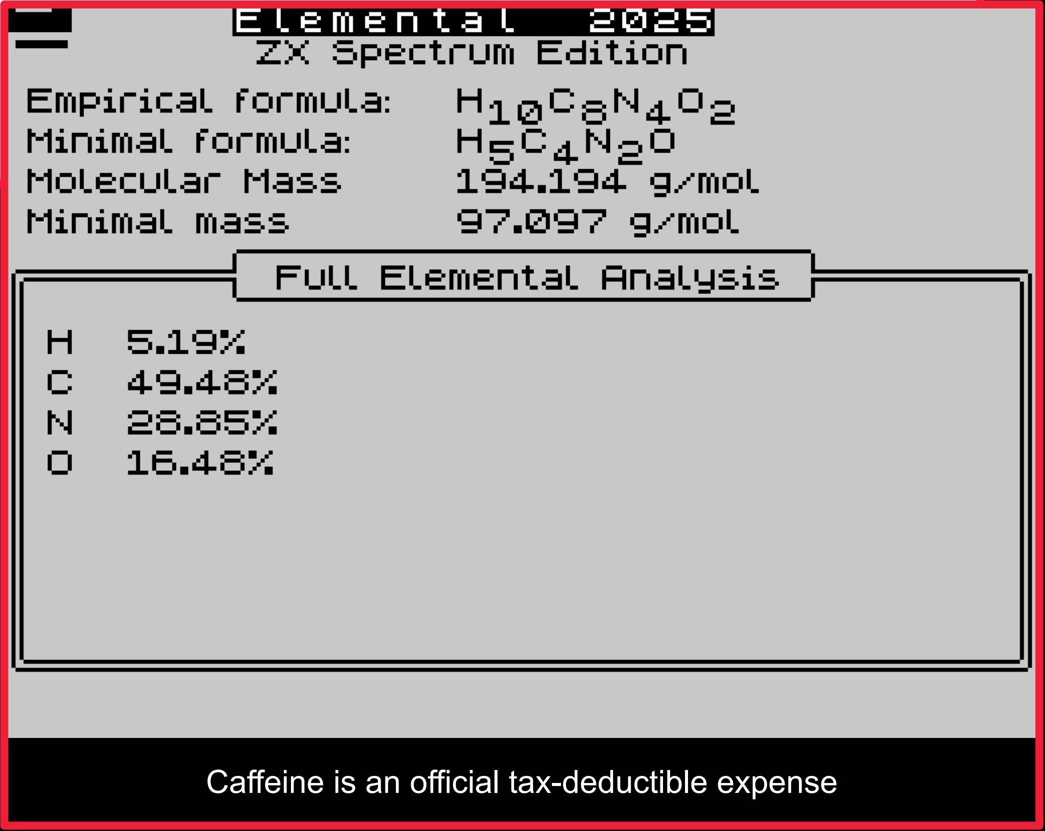
I had to giggle at the author's tagline "Have fun and explore Chemistry with Elemental!". It has the doomed air of a public engagement in science stall, trying to convince shoppers in an outdoor market somewhere that ecology is more fun than TK Maxx. No—this is a niche piece of software that won't be everyone's cup of tea, but hopefully any Speccy enthusiast can appreciate its excellent implementation.

The accompanying readme boasts that it's "the most professional, complete, and sophisticated EA calculator available", and there might be something in that. It has a more extensive database and recognises more terms than the online equivalents I found—including one by The University of Manchester no less.

The Boriel BASIC is fast (though the original 2024 Pascalated version wasn't exactly slow), the UI is well designed, and there are shortcuts. For example it knew every acronym I could think of. Can't remember that Dimethylformamide is C3H7NO? No problem—just type "DMF".

But you can also input enormous chemical formulas with knobs & whistles (or ligands & adducts to be precise) and they are quickly processed with a minimal formula provided. And as I say, I'm not a pure chemist so it does things that I don't even understand!

It's hard to shake the feeling that software for an old computer is somehow inferior to anything new, but putting that to the test here has found the opposite. I'd happily use Elemental for work purposes—in fact it's the justification for using my budget code to buy a 48K, a CRT, and a Spectrum Six Pack, all filed under 'Laboratory Equipment', and with a clear conscience.



Elemental 2025
ZX Spectrum Edition

Empirical formula: $H_{10}C_8N_4O_2$
Minimal formula: $H_5C_4N_2O$
Molecular Mass 194.194 g/mol
Minimal mass 97.097 g/mol

Full Elemental Analysis

H	5.19%
C	49.48%
N	28.85%
O	16.48%

Caffeine is an official tax-deductible expense

Uh-oh.

I don't know what any of this means.

It's all very well for Dave - he's some kind of science-person nerd. He knows what it means when you write 'H' with a tiny 5 after it. He probably knows how to type the little 5, even. I, on the other hand, am more of an ideas guy. Details are someone else's area.

So how am I supposed to review this thing? It certainly looks pretty professional. Black on white, classic Speccy font, like a Football Manager for people who don't like sports. This is about as far as I get.

There's only one thing for it. I wait until the evening, when the others are confined to their cells, and climb up to the highest tower. I straddle the Break Space Time Machine, pop an unnaturally coloured isotonic drink into the holder, and start pedalling. I get as far as 2036 before I notice the alien behemoths hovering in the sky and realise that I'm going the wrong way. No matter. I just reverse the polarity and keep pedalling, eventually hurtling past myself and back to 1990. April 4th, a Wednesday. 12pm.

The plan is to visit my old Chemistry teacher, and get his opinion of it. He was a dreadful nerd so he'll know what's going on, and as he disappeared at around this time, my time-travelling secret would be safe. Wednesdays were a half day, so I catch him in his lab, cleaning up some experiment none of us watched him do, and introduce myself. But myself, from the future!

'You've let yourself go.' He is cold-blooded, this guy.

'Never mind that, I need your opinion on this!' I brandish the Elemental tape and hustle him to the computer lab.

He chuckles. 'This is for a what? A Spectrum? Those are kind of out of date in 1990.'
I didn't travel 36 years back in time to get this kind of reality check, but he's right. The lab has IBM PCs. Those were great! But not helpful right now. So I pop round my house, burgle my Spectrum from under my own nose, interrupting a promising Doomdark's Revenge session. The trauma of that violent event has always stayed with me - these days I'd have gotten some kind of therapy, but no-one got therapy in 1990 except weird Americans. Did teenage me look like Woody Allen? Don't answer that.

Back at the school, I hook up the Spectrum to a TV on a trolley and get the teacher to test Elemental 2025, finally. He seems fairly impressed

Good enough for me! Ace.

Although, he then punches me the face and steals the Time Machine. Stranded in 1990, I have no choice but to suspend myself in the canteen freezer for 35 years. Another successful and consequence-free time-travel trip!

Especially considering that before my big freeze, I cleverly acquired a Sports Almanac, so that back in 2026, I will know all the results from the 1980s and...oh.

Bugger.

BREAK SPACE
vario MICRO

The BreakSpace Elemental Analyser.

So - how does that big red box work? Well, it's a simultaneous CHNS combustion analyzer manufactured by Elementar. This one, specifically : https://www.elementar.com/en/products/organic-elemental-analyzers/vario-el-cube.

It's very expensive.

The CHNS bit means that is determines the balance of Carbon, Hydrogen, Nitrogen and Sulphur in a sample, and the combustion bit means that it does this by setting fire to it in a high-oxygen environment. and checking what's left. It does this by, to the best of my understanding, using dark magic of some kind.

That's not how the website describes it of course - something to do with measuring the resultant Oxygen-combinants (CO_2, H_20, NO, SO_2) - but I'm pretty sure it's magic.

As evidence, check out the original version, from 1831, which couldn't look more like it was built a wizard named Elementar the Wise from a D&D campaign if it tried. Presumably the shiny red box version also contains some bricks and arcane glass tubes.

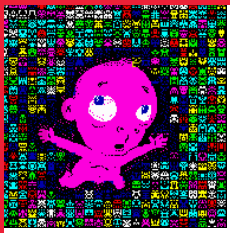
Hopefully that clarifies everything.

Demon Pages

JuanGM

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45240

PWYW / $2



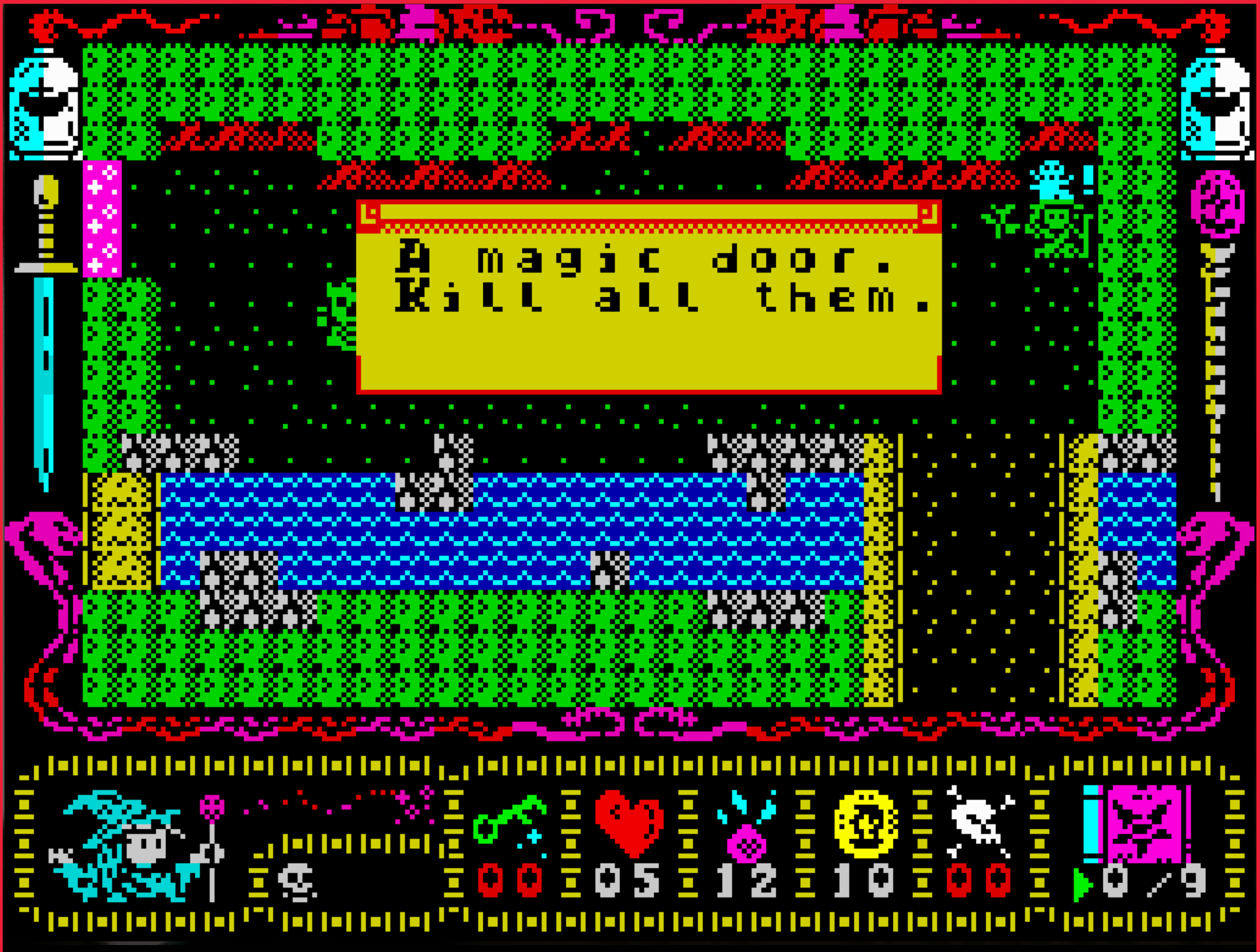
At first glance Demon Pages looks like a Atic Atac / Firelord style actioner, but this is a management game as much as a top-down maze adventure. Yes of course you need to collect the nine pages of the Cursed Grimoire in the correct order, and rescue the Sorceress, but if you want that to happen you'll need to be very thrifty. You start with nothing, not even 50p and a packet of Rolos, but you collect coins and magic (mana) as you play, getting a bonus for every 3 enemy kills. Should you so much as brush up against a demon, or a fire-pit, or a rotating spiky thing, you lose 5 coins along with a life. And that's not an uncommon occurrence, so you'll feel constantly on the breadline.

When you do finally build up some savings, you can visit one of the shops scattered around to buy lives, mana, or a vital key for an eye-watering 15 coins. There is help to be found, from imps that give you advice or a few quid if you're totally skint. They're the ones that say "If you run out of coins, talk to me", which makes me wary because bitter experience has taught me that it's usually accompanied by a lascivious wink and results in me digging over someone's allotment in my underpants—and that's not a euphemism. There's no sinister subtext in this game though—the cash goblins are charitable souls wanting nothing in return.

There's a lot of terrain to cover, some of it the much-loved 'house & hedge' scenery of adventures like Firelord, but there's also dungeons and caverns that are very, very treacherous. Which brings me to that thing we seem to say a lot about Spectrum games—it's too hard. I said it BITD and I'm still saying it. Arguably the modern player should try harder, but it would help if the modern author met us halfway and eased off the difficulty—a bit less frustration would yield a lot more interest.

This is the seventh game by JuanGM, and the fourth set in Beardopolis, which has previously been home to a hipster floor painter and a hydrophobic dragon. Now that Demon Pages has thrown sorcery into the mix, I picture this city as a bohemian melting pot riddled with myth, spirituality and danger—a bit like Hebden Bridge twinned with Gotham, or perhaps just Bristol.

Each new release demonstrates that the author is learning and isn't content to stand still, each time trying out something fresh. So as challenging as it is, I'm looking forward to the next visit to Beardopolis. I've already booked my HairBnB.



A magic door.
Kill all them.

That's what the bloke in my local park always shouts.

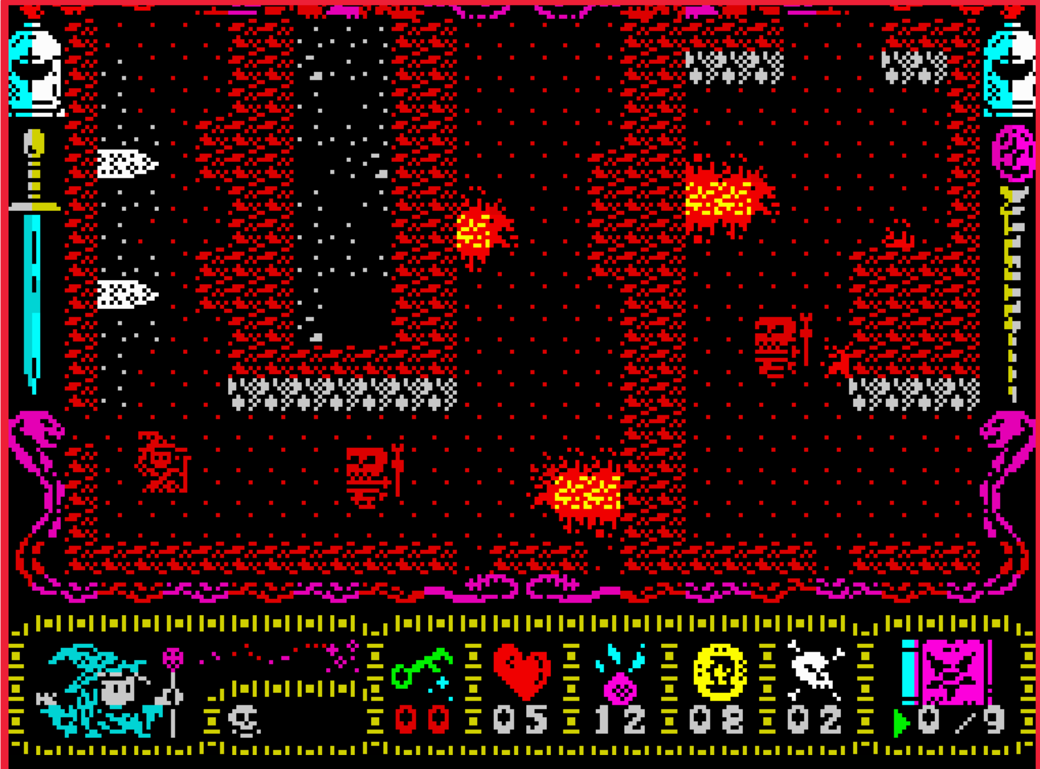
Hot on the heels of "Floppyverse" comes the latest release from JuanMG, a developer who is fast becoming one of my favourites on the Speccy scene. Never afraid to try something new, each of his games is a departure from the last – and Demon Pages is no different. Well, it is different... that's my point...but you see what I mean.

This one is a bit more RPG-ey... wander around a town, talk to the locals, embark on a quest, nip in and out of shops. It's a bit like Firelord, but without the shoplifting. Unfortunately you have to cough up money in this game! Purchase goods such as health, mana and keys, all of which you'll need to progress.

But watch out! Maybe the Beardopolis high street should consider going cashless like Pizza Hut, because the realm is filled with crooks who will rob you blind. Luckily, there's a little blue fella about (who I like to imagine is Morph from Tony Hart's Heartbeat) who generously hands out free coins, offers advice and points you in the right direction. What a nice chap!

Speaking of the right direction, I jumped straight into this game without really knowing what I was doing (being a bloke – I don't need directions), and I soon found myself lost in a series of dead ends and blind alleys. What I should have been doing was following the numbered signposts that lead to the pages, which MUST be picked up in the correct order – otherwise they won't appear. Once I'd learned this, I began to enjoy the game much more and began to progress...instead of wandering around like a tit in a trance*.

I was expecting the game to be a good deal deeper than it actually is, but scratch the surface and it's your standard collect-em-up. I feel more could have been done with the RPG elements, and I agree with ZXDave that the difficulty level is a tad on the tough side. I got a little vexed at being robbed all the time! You can gain coins with every 3rd nasty you kill, but that uses up your mana, which you'll then have to spend money to replenish – so it's all a bit catch-22.



This part of town badly needs investment.

I did enjoy Demon Pages, and it's better than many games made with ZXGM... but I was left with a sense of "what if...?". The game could have been great – it just falls that tiny bit short. A quick tip: the very last door leads you to believe you need more pages to open it, when in fact I was just missing a key. Thank me later!

*(*This is a Manchester phrase, apparently, that Jon got from his Granddad. It's too weird to take out. - Ed)*

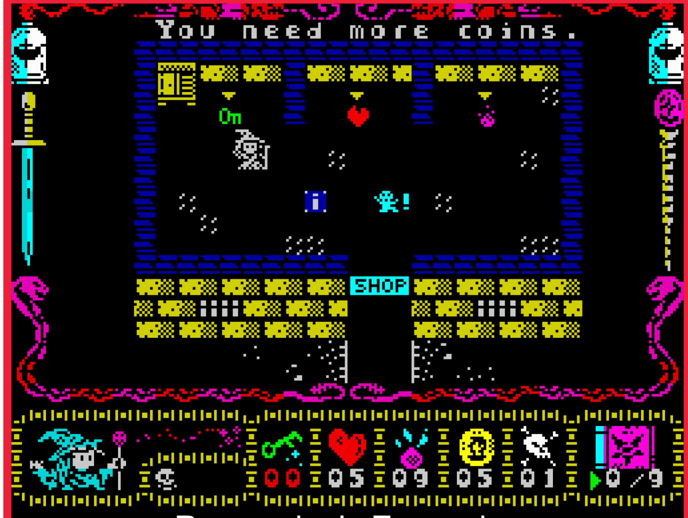
I'm wary when the Crew complains about things being too difficult, but these two acquitted themselves well enough in the Flapper high-score debacle (See page 58), so I approached this with some trepidation. And, you know what? I thought it was a bit on the difficult side too. There's no one thing that's too hard, it's just a bit unforgiving and it feels like a bit of a chore, as a result, especially when retracing your steps through a tricky dungeon.

The economy feels a bit tight too, so there's a constant restriction on your basic resources that I just didn't enjoy. Even when you have fireballs at the ready, there's this constant question of whether you can afford to waste them. That's a survival horror mainstay, but here it just triggered more anxiety than entertainment.

It might just be that JuanGM is just really good at games, and doesn't realise how tricky the rest of us find them. Maybe he can ask a less competent friend to test out his next game and take some notes.

It's a shame, because it gets a lot right. The setting feels great, and there's a proper sense of adventure and heroism - not easy to pull off. And there's no denying that it looks fantastic. The sprites look good, the framing interface is really well put together and it's all very colourful.

Very much worth a look then, especially if you have the patience and skill to master the steep learning curve.



Reassuringly Expensive

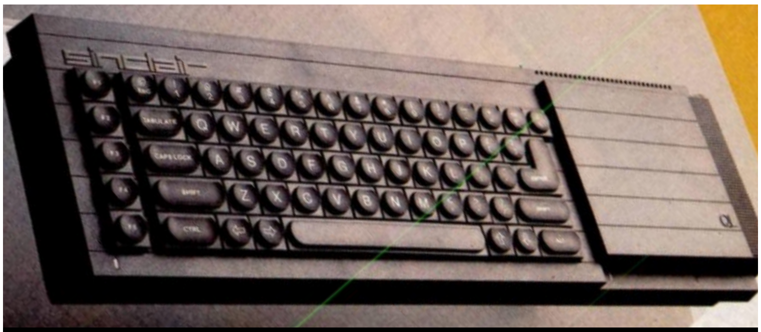
The Sinclair QL

A Quantum Leap...to Where?

Back in 1984, Sinclair Research launched the ambitious and innovative QL.
We check in on how it's getting on.

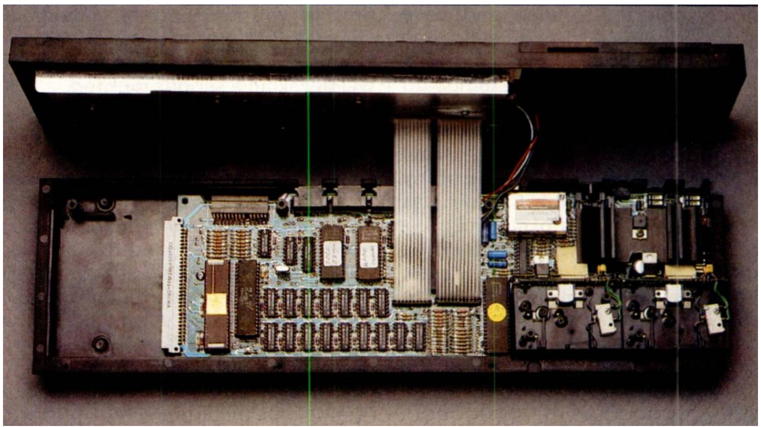
Text by Jamie

When we think of Sir Clive Sinclair, our minds often jump to the ubiquitous Spectrum, the pocket calculator, or, infamously, the C5 - An electric tricycle for a dream Britain that never was. And it’s this last project that holds a key to understanding the fate of one of his most ambitious computers: the Sinclair QL (Quantum Leap).



The QL displays signature Sinclair style

By 1984, Sinclair’s attention was famously divided. His passion project, the C5, was to be a revolutionary personal transport solution for the masses, rivalling the car. History, of course, judges it a commercial disaster. A good product that failed to find its market. In a twist of irony, had it been marketed as a toy rather than serious transport, it might have found the success it later enjoyed as a curiosity. But the C5's catastrophic failure consumed Sinclair's focus and capital at the very moment its technological sibling, the QL, was fighting to be born.



The QL's neatly laid out innards

The QL was conceived as a professional machine, a step beyond the hobbyist Spectrum. It was a bold vision: a sleek, black "slab" of computing power with a built-in multi-tasking operating system (or pre-emptive multitasking as they called it). And it still looks stunning today. Sinclair understood that aesthetics sold technology, and he never made a bad looking product. Yet, beneath its stylish exterior lay two critical, self-inflicted wounds.

First, the bespoke keyboard. Determined to avoid the "dead flesh" keys of the Spectrum, Sinclair commissioned a unique, custom solution. In typical Sinclair fashion, it defiantly broke convention. The key shapes were unusual, the layout was non-standard – there is no Delete or Backspace key, a startling omission for a machine aimed at business. The baffling truth? Standard, off the shelf keyboard parts would have provided a familiar, efficient typing experience and been cheaper to manufacture. Sinclair's insistence on a custom, idiosyncratic solution drove costs up and produced a worse typing experience.

But if you think that's an own goal, just wait.

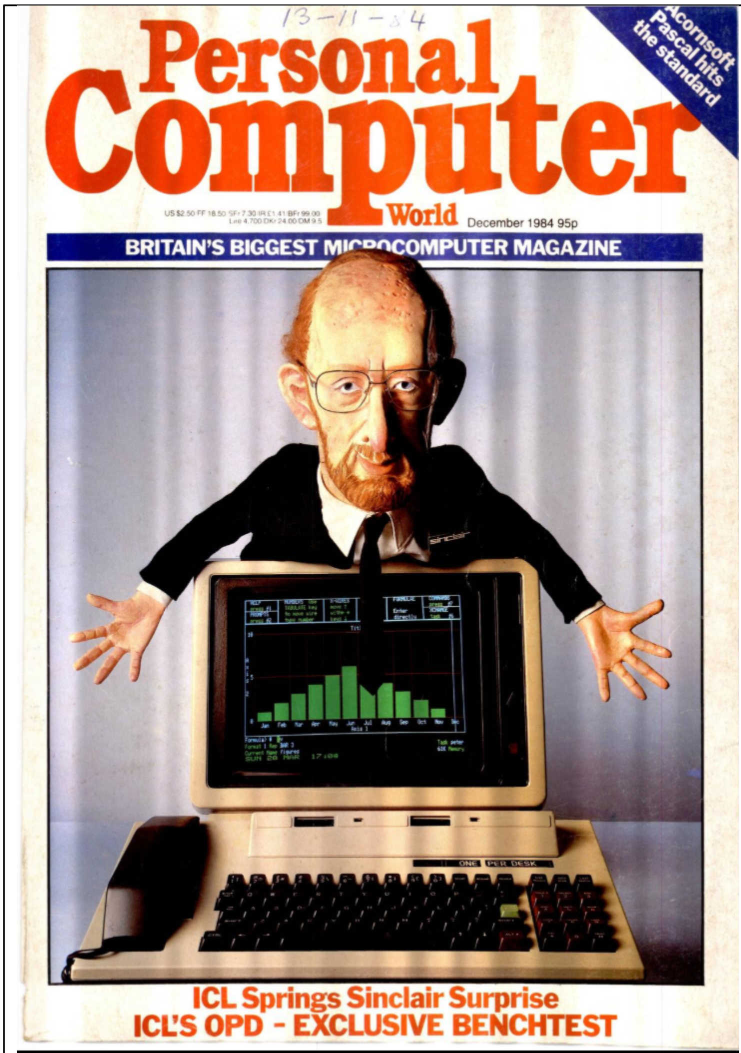
Second, and more damaging, were the Microdrives. These innovative but fragile tape-loop storage systems were pushed to run at speeds beyond their reliable limits. This engineering hubris caused massive delays, as the team wrestled with chronic reliability issues. The lesson was clear: had Sinclair used existing, stable Microdrive technology and a conventional keyboard, the QL would have reached the market sooner, cheaper, and with far fewer teething troubles.

I'm not for one second suggesting my solutions would have fixed every gripe. No disk drive or mouse environment were key omissions out of step with a market rushing towards IBM compatibility. But my fixes would have brought a more reliable product to market quicker and cheaper. It's not every day you can make a change that results in cheaper,
better and quicker – this is arguably one of those rare exceptions.

But ah, the gift of hindsight! The future was very different. The C5 bankrupted the company, forcing its sale to Alan Sugar, who canned the QL immediately.

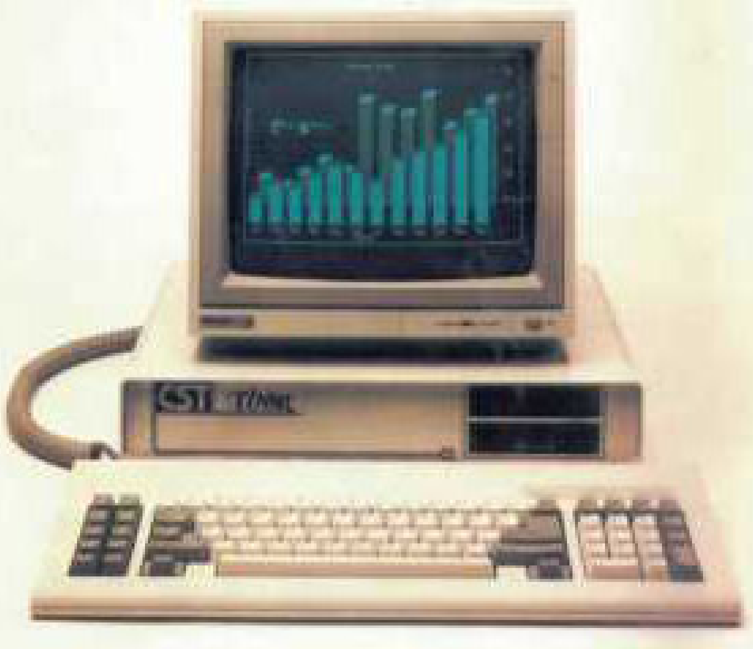
This wasn't quite the end for the hardware though.

International Computers Limited had built their own clone in association with Sinclair. This was called the One-Per-Desk and featured a nifty built in telephone and souped-up Microdrives. This was in use internally at ICL until at least the late 90s - as confirmed by our own Lee, who worked there at the time.


13-11-84
Acornsoft Pascal hits the standard
Personal Computer World
US $2.50 FF 18.50 SFr 7.30 IR £1.41 BFr 99.00 Lire 4,700 DKr 24.00 DM 9.5
December 1984 95p
BRITAIN'S BIGGEST MICROCOMPUTER MAGAZINE
ICL Springs Sinclair Surprise
ICL'S OPD - EXCLUSIVE BENCHTEST

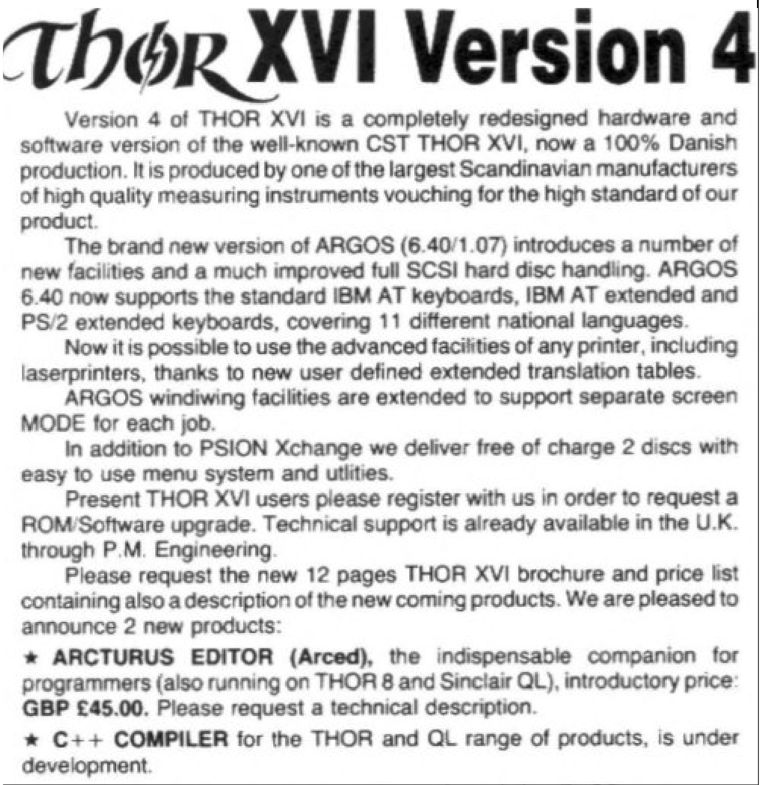
ICL's One-Per-Desk tested in PCW, Dec 1984

Also, when Amstrad closed down QL production, the remaining stock was purchased by Cambridge Systems Technology, a company that had previously been producing peripherals. They released the enhanced QL-compatible Thor PC in 1986. Notably, this did feature an IBM PC/AT style keyboard, and industry standard floppy drives.



The Thor 16

In 1989, in collaboration with the Danish company Dansoft, CST had announced a deal with a Russian company to purchase 1,000 units of the new Thor 16 in a deal worth up to £2m, but political upheaval would eventually put an end to that deal.



ThOR XVI Version 4

Version 4 of THOR XVI is a completely redesigned hardware and software version of the well-known CST THOR XVI, now a 100% Danish production. It is produced by one of the largest Scandinavian manufacturers of high quality measuring instruments vouching for the high standard of our product.

The brand new version of ARGOS (6.40/1.07) introduces a number of new facilities and a much improved full SCSI hard disc handling. ARGOS 6.40 now supports the standard IBM AT keyboards, IBM AT extended and PS/2 extended keyboards, covering 11 different national languages.

Now it is possible to use the advanced facilities of any printer, including laserprinters, thanks to new user defined extended translation tables.

ARGOS windiwing facilities are extended to support separate screen MODE for each job.

In addition to PSION Xchange we deliver free of charge 2 discs with easy to use menu system and utlities.

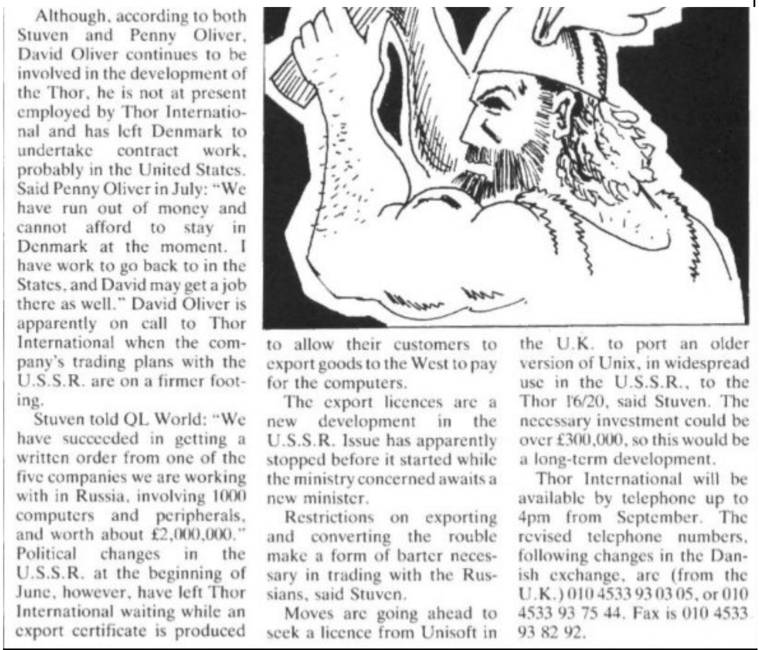
Present THOR XVI users please register with us in order to request a ROM/Software upgrade. Technical support is already available in the U.K. through P.M. Engineering.

Please request the new 12 pages THOR XVI brochure and price list containing also a description of the new coming products. We are pleased to announce 2 new products:

★ **ARCTURUS EDITOR (Arced)**, the indispensable companion for programmers (also running on THOR 8 and Sinclair QL), introductory price: **GBP £45.00.** Please request a technical description.

★ **C++ COMPILER** for the THOR and QL range of products, is under development.

A 1989 print ad for the Thor 16 v4...



Although, according to both Stuven and Penny Oliver, David Oliver continues to be involved in the development of the Thor, he is not at present employed by Thor International and has left Denmark to undertake contract work, probably in the United States. Said Penny Oliver in July: "We have run out of money and cannot afford to stay in Denmark at the moment. I have work to go back to in the States, and David may get a job there as well." David Oliver is apparently on call to Thor International when the company's trading plans with the U.S.S.R. are on a firmer footing.

Stuven told QL World: "We have succeeded in getting a written order from one of the five companies we are working with in Russia, involving 1000 computers and peripherals, and worth about £2,000,000." Political changes in the U.S.S.R. at the beginning of June, however, have left Thor International waiting while an export certificate is produced to allow their customers to export goods to the West to pay for the computers.

The export licences are a new development in the U.S.S.R. Issue has apparently stopped before it started while the ministry concerned awaits a new minister.

Restrictions on exporting and converting the rouble make a form of barter necessary in trading with the Russians, said Stuven.

Moves are going ahead to seek a licence from Unisoft in the U.K. to port an older version of Unix, in widespread use in the U.S.S.R., to the Thor 16/20, said Stuven. The necessary investment could be over £300,000, so this would be a long-term development.

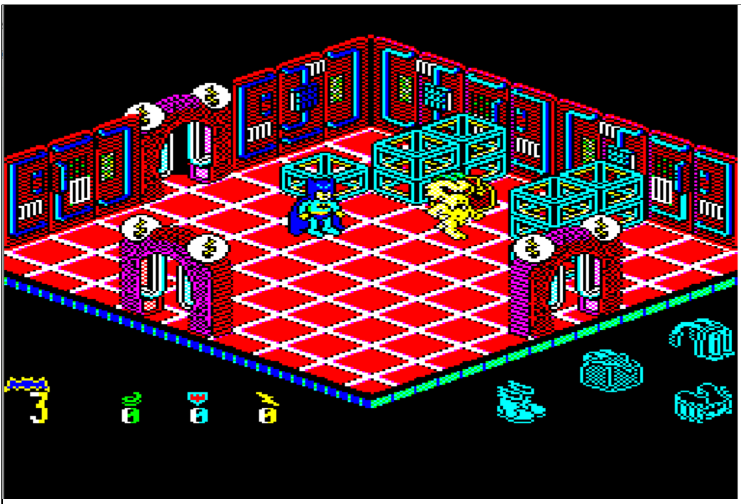
Thor International will be available by telephone up to 4pm from September. The revised telephone numbers, following changes in the Danish exchange, are (from the U.K.) 010 4533 93 03 05, or 010 4533 93 75 44. Fax is 010 4533 93 82 92.

...but things were looking rough for Dansoft and Thor according to this QL World article

Despite its profound flaws, the QL's legacy is surprisingly secure. It brought the first true multi-tasking operating system to a pre-packaged home computer. A genuine quantum leap in concept. And while commercial success eluded it, the machine forged a passionate, international community of devotees who continue to champion its unique character.

QL Today

You might think the story ends in the mid-80s, but you'd be wrong. This small, hardcore following has nurtured a remarkable homebrew scene. In the last few years, developers have pushed the humble QL to places Sinclair could only have dreamed of, creating games that are not just nostalgic curiosities, but incredible technical achievements. Let's explore (In my own personal idiosyncratic order) some of the most notable titles that have brought this classic machine back to life…



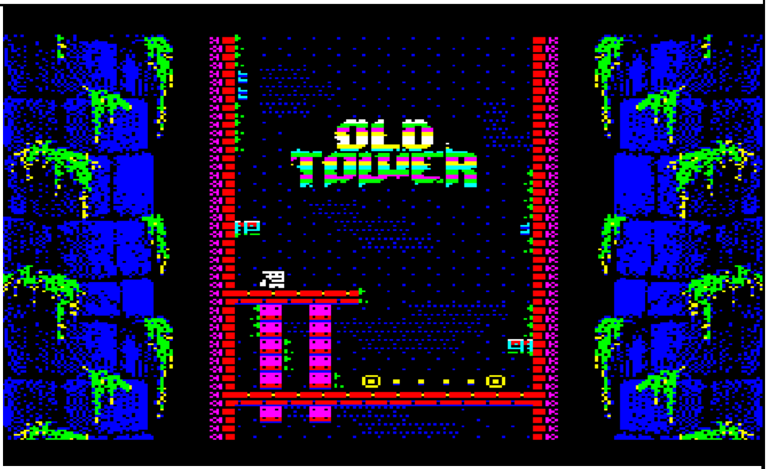
Batman (2021 - 2025) Joan Gayón

If the Sinclair QL had enjoyed the commercial life it deserved, Jon Ritman and Bernie Drummond's iconic Batman (1986) would surely have been ported to the machine. It never was. The QL was discontinued by Amstrad just weeks before the game's release. But that omission has now been spectacularly corrected.

Spanish programmer Joan Gayón, driven by childhood nostalgia and technical curiosity, spent years mastering the QL's idiosyncratic hardware to craft not merely a port, but a definitive re-imagining. His version transforms the original Spectrum's monochrome isometric world into a glorious, full colour experience, exploiting the QL's eight colour palette with astonishing artistry. Every one of the original screens is present, every puzzle intact, every enemy and bat-gadget rendered with fluid precision.

Written in pure 68000 assembler and requiring a 640k memory expansion, it is a technical tour de force that doesn't simply rival the original – it surpasses it with one bold quantum leap. More than four years in the making, Gayón's Batman is not just another homebrew title. It is an epic journey of retro devotion that stands as one of the finest games ever released for the Sinclair QL, and a powerful testament to the machine's enduring, international community.

Old Tower (2026) - Jim McKay

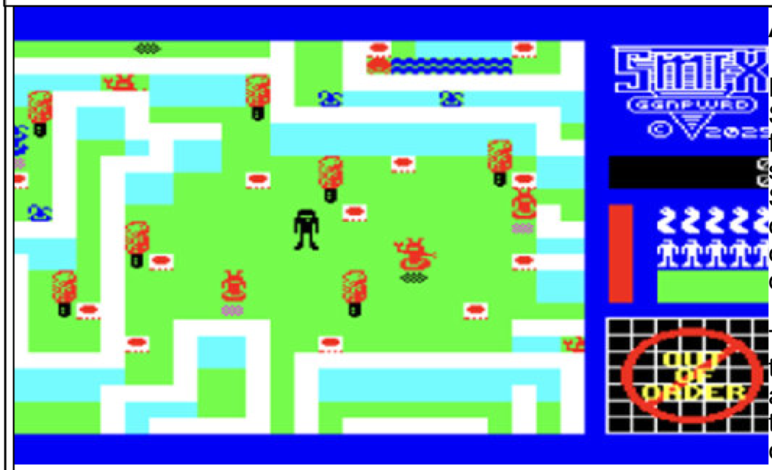


Old Tower continues where Batman left off. Dazzling, it's a lavish, colour rich re-imagining of a modern Spectrum classic.

Originally developed by Russian studio RetroSouls for the ZX Spectrum in 2018, Old Tower was a competition entry inspired by the mobile hit Tomb of the Mask, notable for being the Spectrum's first ever multicolour scroller. Fast forward to 2026, and programmer Jim McKay has delivered a ground up, bespoke conversion for the Sinclair QL that is, for me, the definitive version.

Everything is here. All the levels are faithfully recreated, with splendid full colour graphics, buttery smooth vertical scrolling, and optional AY music via Qsound (many emulators support this hardware addon). McKay even offers two editions: a lean 57KB build for 128K machines and a generously expanded version with five compressed music tracks for systems with 256K or more. It runs from a single Microdrive.

The controls are tight, the puzzles are challenging, and the presentation is polished to a professional standard. Old Tower is not merely a competent port; it's yet another masterclass in how to translate a modern retro game to the QL with love, technical skill, and deep respect for the source material.

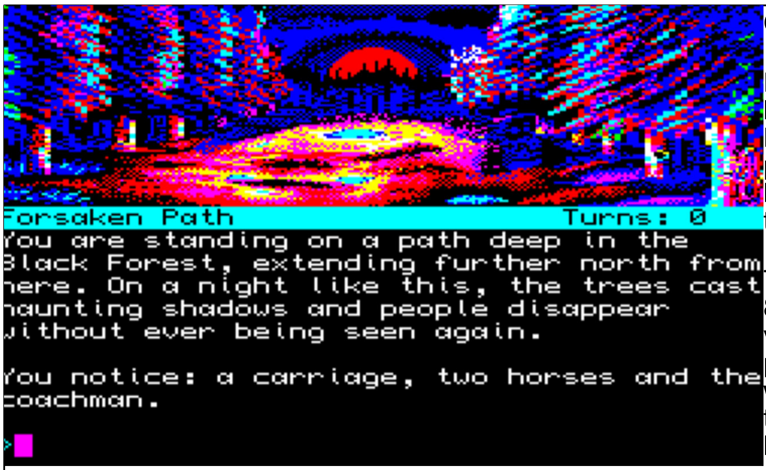


Android 2 (2025) - Spkr & Ggn

For this QL conversion Spkr and Ggn came together to prove Spectrum games can shine when implemented on their favoured machine. Android 2, Vortex Software's 1986 isometric snake-hunting cult classic, was too hard for me on the Spectrum. Their QL port runs at a saner speed, toning the challenge down just enough to make the game feel like a fun challenge rather than an impossible feat of reflexes and dexterity.

The QL version runs about 20% slower, and this is a very good thing. You have time to think. The game breathes. You get to act tactically, plan your moves, review the lay of the land, and then attack those evil snakes at a time and place of your choosing.

Everything else, from the intro sequence to the isometric charm, remains intact. The team made an artistic decision to keep true to the original graphics rather than enhance them – a wise decision, because the game looks great already. Android 2 on the QL was one I really had a blast playing. A truly impressive conversion.



```
Forsaken Path                Turns: 0
You are standing on a path deep in the
Black Forest, extending further north from
here. On a night like this, the trees cast
haunting shadows and people disappear
without ever being seen again.

You notice: a carriage, two horses and the
coachman.

>
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Curse of Rabenstein (2025) – A. Pemberton & A. Tenu

For Halloween, Pemberton and Tenu ported a game that has become something of a horror classic on the Spectrum Next: Curse of Rabenstein. Paul Jenkinson's 2025 DAAD powered, vampire slaying adventure is great for beginners because of its short length, generosity with clues, and puzzles that rarely demand complex solutions.

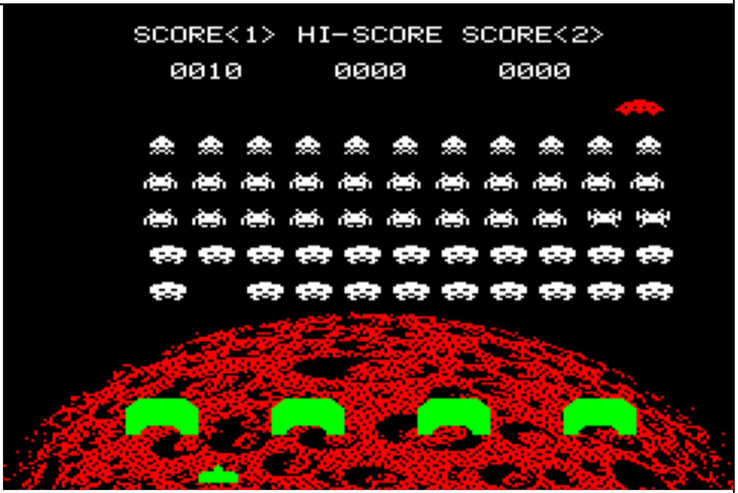
The QL version arrived with two editions on one disk: a classic 8 colour build for standard machines, and a glorious SMSQ/E version supporting 256 colours. Alan and crew made it easy peasy for total QL noobs too. They have a version packaged with an emulator – just unzip and play. I was also able to play the 256 colour version from the disk image on QPC2, which looks incredibly slick.

This is probably the perfect place to jump in first. It's a great game, and it's a bridge – taking you from the familiar comfort of the ZX Spectrum to the real Spectrum Next, the QL, holding your hand all the way.

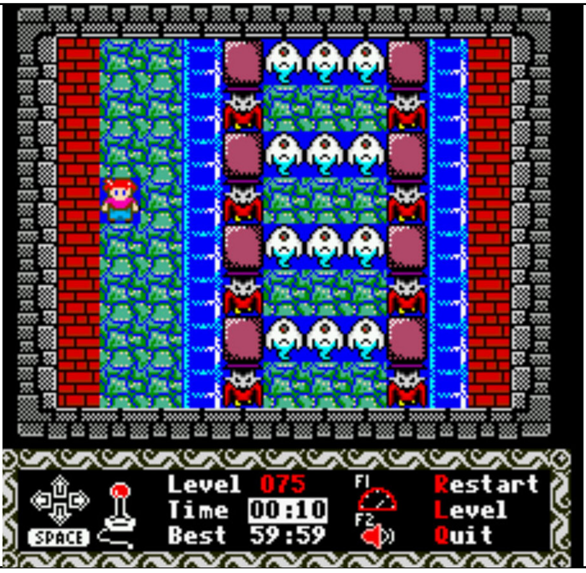
Space Invaders (2024) – Simon Greenaway

Sometimes the old ideas are the best, and sometimes the simplest ideas are the hardest. Simon Greenaway's Space Invaders is exactly what it says on the tin: "as accurate to the original arcade game as I can be bothered". And can I just say, he bothered. A lot.

The result is a port so smooth, so faithful, it feels less like a homebrew clone and more like the professional conversion the QL should have had in 1984. Greenaway made a game that runs impressively on original hardware and absolutely flies on turbocharged QLs with Gold Cards (which is how I played it). Silky framerate, precise hit detection, that unmistakable descending dread.



This is the arcade original, rendered in the QL's eight colour palette, running on forty year old British computing's most brilliantly bonkers hardware. No gimmicks. No isometric puzzles. Just rows of aliens, a single laser cannon, and the relentless ticking clock of their descent. Perfect.



Pitman (2024) - Andrei Tenu

Catrap is a Japanese exclusive hidden gem on the Game Boy. Think of the crate pushing Sokoban games as a side on spectacle, complete with platforming staples of ladders and collapsible platforms. Andrew has produced a spectacular port of this game using the QL's SuperBASIC in the form of Pitman.

Andrei is no slouch when it comes to making impressive games and software for the QL. His similar titles include Qstar and Qstar2, both classic crate shifting games from the 80s. I chose Pitman to showcase today, but his other games deserve a look too.

It's so impressive that games of this quality can be produced in SuperBASIC. Pitman contains some quite challenging puzzles, but its gentle learning curve gives you a fighting chance. Well worth checking out – it's a truly great port.

And that, sadly, brings me to the end of this feature. One I have really enjoyed exploring.

At the start, the QL was relatively unfamiliar to me, and I confess it's not always straightforward to navigate its vast (and I do mean vast) ecosystem. Aftermarket ROMs, software, hardware addons and – excitingly – new and more powerful machines like cloned Gold Cards, SD interfaces and the Q68 await the curious explorer. But it's in part this mysterious tinkerers' warren of revision and development branches that keeps the QL so exotic in the first place.

All in all I count 24 new games for the QL in the last three years. That's nowhere near as many as the humble Speccy, but that sort of thinking misses the point. Visit the forums (Spanish and English) for yourself, and find a vibrant scene of friendly folk up to all sorts of technical wizardry that doesn't sit neatly in a gaming article. And that's very fitting, because it shows the QL was more than the cheap gaming machine that was the Spectrum's niche.

In that way I think Sinclair gets the last laugh. On its launch, the magazines scoffed: "A Quantum Leap to where?" Forty years later the community answers as loudly as ever – to endless tinkering! And isn't that what a computer was meant to be? A bicycle for the mind.

Shift

Haplo

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45225

PWYW / $4.99

“Inside is outside, and light and dark don’t differ!”

Wise words indeed - not mine, but those of Haplo, author of SHIFT. After appearing on pretty much every format known to man, the game has finally made its debut on the Speccy. Hooray!

In this great-looking monochromatic puzzle platformer you play as Test Subject 0111, experimenting with the use of the “SHIFT device” - alien technology that can flip gravity and swap planes. The aim of the game is to escape each room by using this alien tech to manipulate reality. Kempston joystick is supported, but I found using the keyboard gave me better precision with my jumps: the usual Q, A, O and P keys, with SPACE to ...“SHIFT”.

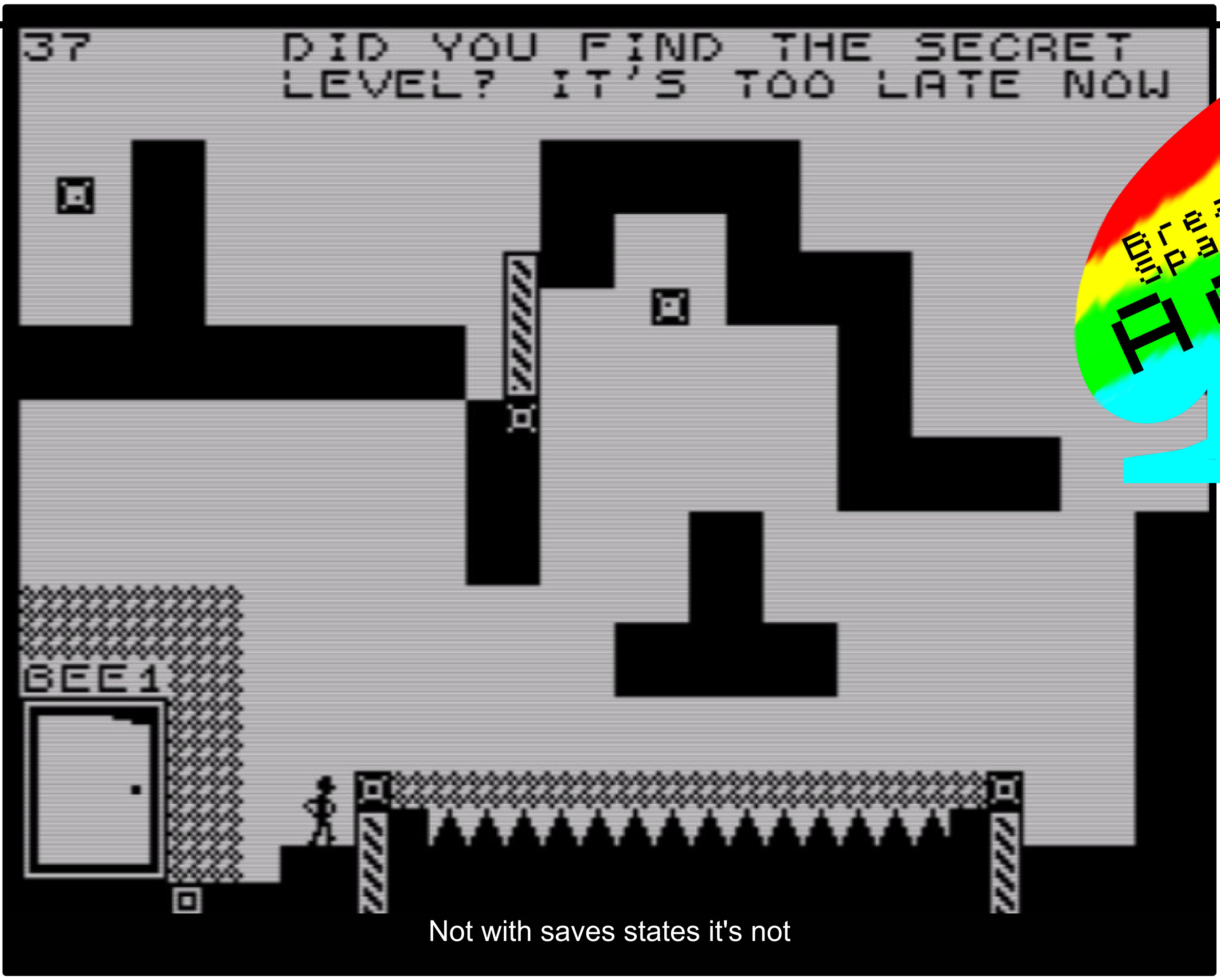
"SHIFT? What are you talking about, man?" I hear you ask! Oh cripes... how best to explain it? SHIFTING sort of 'flips' the entire world. White becomes black, black becomes white; what was solid becomes empty, and empty space becomes solid. Barriers vanish and heading downwards in one state means travelling upwards in the other state. Make sense? Good - let's move on!

Luckily, you’re indestructible, so there’s no need to worry about lives, energy, long falls or pesky human-being inconveniences like that. There are 45 levels in the Speccy version, plus a “secret level” - which I haven’t managed to locate yet (but I daresay the other fancy-pants reviewers have.) I’ve seen some feedback suggesting the game has a couple of bugs, but I didn’t encounter anything serious in my playthroughs. The little fella did occasionally get stuck in a wall - but if you’re messing around with alien technology, I suppose you have to expect that sort of thing.

Let’s cut to the chase - this game is top-notch. It's so refreshing to see a platformer which dares to try something a bit different. The game starts off gently, with the difficulty ramping up at just the right pace - later levels introduce buttons, platforms and bramble bushes(!) which can only be cleared by activating a pickaxe - obviously the aliens were too busy subverting reality to worry about little things like lawn maintenance.

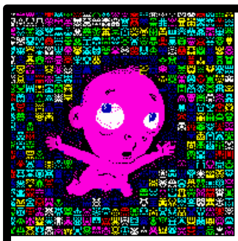
The ingenuity that’s gone into the level design is incredible, the animation on Mr Test Subject 0111 is very charming, and the soundtrack neatly rounds off an altogether brill little package - one you won’t want to put down until you’ve finished it. It’s not a game you’ll forget in a hurry either... I completed it a few days ago and I’m still seeing images of it every time I close my eyes (in fact I very well may need to see an optician).

Go and play it now - go on... SHIFT yourself!



37 DID YOU FIND THE SECRET LEVEL? IT'S TOO LATE NOW

Not with saves states it's not

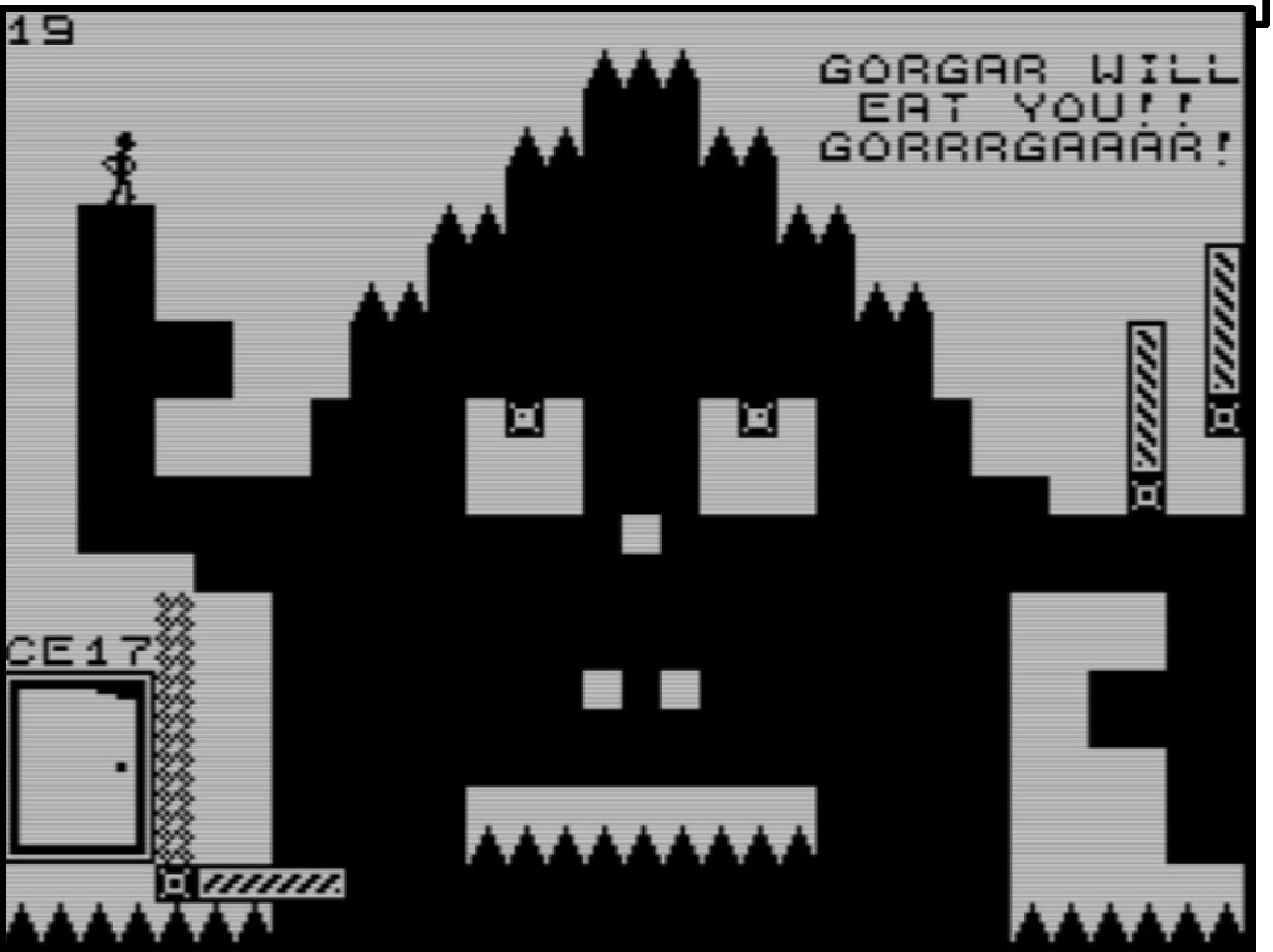


I love it when modern indy games make it onto the Speccy. It makes me wonder how they would have fared BITD. Would the minimalist graphics that are very much in vogue now have turned off the player & magazine reviewer of yesteryear? Possibly—I for one was yearning only for 16bit pixel realism back then.

Shift's 45 levels (and oddly, only 36 on the C64) may seem daunting, but remember it's a PC game port bringing modern sensibilities with it—infy lives, restarts and passwords. The level puzzles are on the right side of easy too, so more than usual will be able to play it through.

I'm embarrassed to say that I never properly sussed the inversion mechanic. While I had a good idea of what to do, solving a level involved more wandering about trying things rather than getting it all in one big think. My own shortcomings didn't spoil the thrill of the chase though.

So while Shift may not have got a YS Megagame in the 1980s, the style, concept and execution would have gained it cult classic status. And today? The music alone could win a demoscene award, and the game itself, well—do we have an Ace on our hands, Ed?



Survival Horror fans are catered to as well

Let's get this out of the way: I never fully grasped the core mechanic of Shift. I had only the thinnest intellectual understanding of what was happening on screen. You "invert" the map. The solid platform you were just standing on becomes a corridor you're now standing in. At first it's a tad confusing.

But here's the secret: you don't need to fully master the concept to absolutely love this game. The brilliance of Shift lies in its elegant design, which allows you to learn through playful trial and error. A little confusion is part of the charm, not a barrier. Stumble, press the 'shift' key, watch the world flip, and suddenly you find a new path to victory.

The game possesses a fantastic modern indie sensibility. It's a joy to see games like this thriving on the humble ZX Spectrum. Its stylish minimalism and mind-bending premise actually reminded me a little of Dr. Beep's 2011 brilliant Wiwo Dido: The Case of the Lost Keys, another title where surreal mechanics create brilliant puzzles. High praise indeed.

In short, Shift is a solid, inventive, and memorable puzzle game. Don't be intimidated for a second. Embrace the disorientation, enjoy the "aha!" moments, and you'll have a fantastic time from start to finish. Highly recommended

Sinclair Sketch

Wizbit Games

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45194

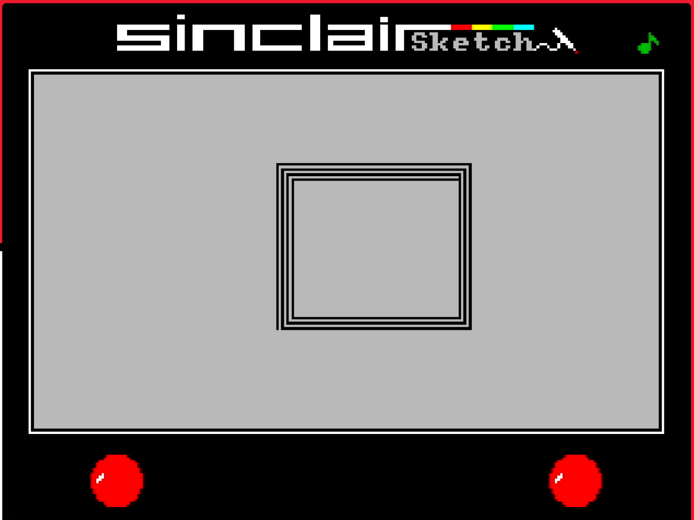
Free

Quick question: who didn't own an Etch-a-Sketch as a child? Because, unless you're under the age of - I'm guessing here - 35, you almost certainly did. And most likely, you got this for Christmas too. Am I right? Okay, so you didn't, Reginald. But for everyone else, you definitely did.

A point of personal nostalgia for me is that I'd write my own version of this popular mechanical, knob-driven drawing toy on the School's Acorn BBC computers, the [School] Science lab's VIC-20 and my own ZX81. Even in my advancing years, I still miss the simplicity of Sinclair [ZX81] BASIC and its quirky "one-key" entry system.

Sinclair Sketch brings the excitement and nostalgia to the Speccy at last, outside of program listings printed in Sinclair User and other early magazines. Control a single pixel around a defined off-white area, clear the screen, and try to do something more than some diagonal lines, or a few rudimentary square shapes. Mastering anything more takes a lot of patience:

You don't quite know where your pen point is, so back-tracking to deviate from an already imprinted black line has the same feel of skill that the toy has; or, in my case, it was mostly luck. But my more artistic friend had refined the rotary controls of the original. Then again, I was never an artist.

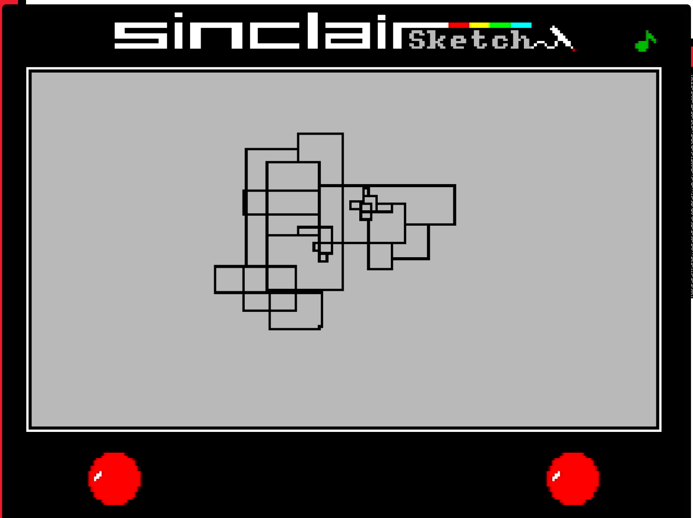


Trying to make a spiral. Off by 1 pixel again!

Regardless of my artistic talents (or lack thereof), I do enjoy this release. It's rather cathartic, nae mesmerising, to be focused on trying to create something other than some simple shapes. My go to "art" is to try to make a square spiral but just like playing a Snake variant, I keep messing up.

For such a simple computer program, this is very well presented, though I would have liked the screen to "shake" when it is cleared, and the cosmetic red controllers to rotate as you move the pixel across the canvas.

A real plus is the included AY music, a rendition of "The Final Countdown", a famous 1986 song from the band Europe, and one that I like to play on deadline day, much to the annoyance of my colleagues here. It's time to enjoy this mechanical toy in digital form again: Sinclair Sketch is a true delight.



Now that's art.

I am the world's number one authority on ZX Spectrum Etch A Sketch simulations. It's a bold claim, yes. But it comes with credentials.

It all started back in 2022, when I was a young man in my prime of 43. Without a gray hair on my head, I was the judge of that year's prestigious Crap Game Competition. What started as a joke on a forum - "let's all submit Etch A Sketch games to this year's comp"- quickly got out of hand as hordes of Spectrum enthusiasts proceeded to submit nothing but Etch A Sketch games for a number of weeks. Hairs turned gray. My youthful disposition gave way to a Blakean worldliness.

After the first review, I had said all there was to say on the matter—did you know the original Etch A Sketch was made of glass? That it was lethally dangerous? I learnt so much, but the main lessons were: a) Etch A Sketch as a toy is not particularly fun, and b) Spectrum versions even less so.

Many years later, my hair now as silvered as the game's recently shaken glass, I am faced with this new Spectrum incarnation. I can firmly say my views haven't budged much. As this one goes - it's alright.

An Etch A Sketch is a classic mechanical drawing toy invented in the 1950s and popularized in the 1960s. It consists of a flat, rectangular plastic frame enclosing a gray screen coated with a mixture of aluminium powder and plastic beads.

Inside, two knobs control a hidden stylus: one moves it horizontally, the other vertically. Turning the knobs draws lines by scraping away the powder, revealing the dark screen beneath. The result is a distinctive, silvery line drawing.

To erase, simply shake the toy vigorously - the powder recoats the screen, wiping the image clean for a fresh start. No batteries or refills are needed.

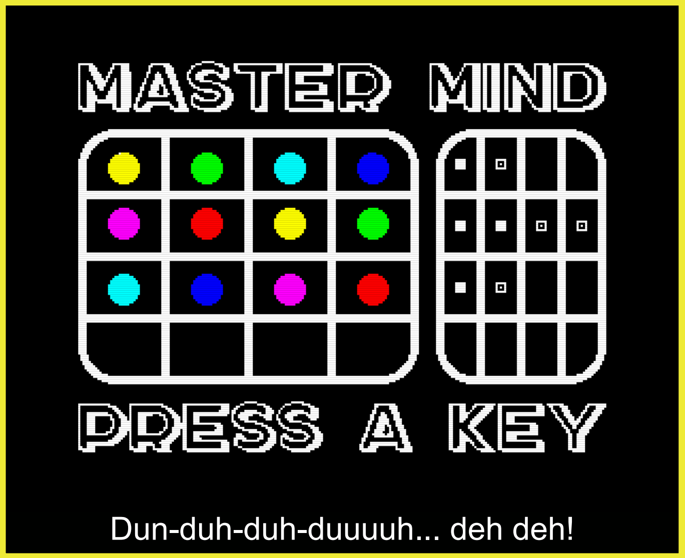
Simple yet endlessly creative, the Etch A Sketch has entertained generations of children and adults with its satisfying analog drawing experience and instant "undo" button.

Mastermind

Yevrowl

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45182

Free



Dun-duh-duh-duuuuh... deh deh!

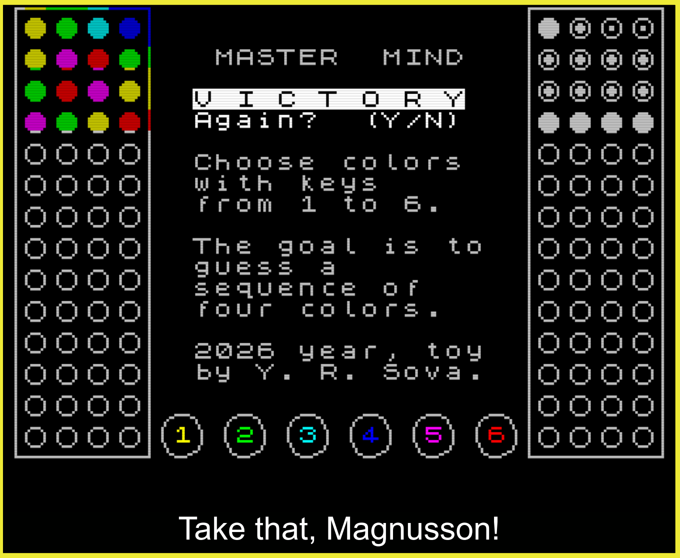
Ah, Mastermind. The chair, the spotlight, the overly-dramatic music, Magnus Magnusson with his little cards, the dismay of getting to the end of the show and realising that you didn't manage to answer a single question and wishing Doctor Who was on instead.

All of which has absolutely nothing to do with *this* Master Mind, which is a Speccy interpretation of the popular code-breaking board game. If you've somehow missed the other (checks notes) 67 versions of this which appear on our rubber-keyed chum, it goes something like this:

The computer picks a sequence of four colours from a possible six (you can choose when you begin whether the same colour is allowed to appear more than once, which makes it a bit harder). You then have to guess the colours and the sequence by placing a number of coloured pegs. The computer will then place pegs of its own showing you how many colours are correct and in the right place (a big white peg), correct but in the wrong place (a smaller peg) or just plain wrong (a tiny peg). You have fourteen goes to get it right, otherwise - DEATH. No, sorry, my mistake - you just lose.

The game is written entirely in BASIC but responses and screen redraws are nice and fast, so you're not sitting around twiddling your thumbs. Graphically it's quite pleasant to look at despite being a simple board game, with a super loading screen and a tidy in-game display. There is a little bit of colour clash when your pegs are placed, but that doesn't detract from the game itself. Unfortunately there is no sound at all, but you can always pop the Mastermind TV show theme on repeat for the full immersive experience.

Master Mind won't change your world, or your opinion if you already know you don't like the source game, but it does what it sets out to do very well and that's worthy of a thumbs up. If I had one little niggle it's that keys you press to choose the colours don't match the Speccy's usual numbers (1 for blue, 2 for red, etc.) which meant I couldn't play by muscle memory alone. That's a tiny gripe, however, and if you're hankering for a decent game of Mastermind then you won't go far wrong here.



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MASTER  MIND

VICTORY
Again?  (Y/N)

Choose colors
with keys
from 1 to 6.

The goal is to
guess a
sequence of
four colors.

2026 year, toy
by Y. R. Sova.

1  2  3  4  5  6
```

Take that, Magnusson!

Ah, Mastermind. I've got the board game - the old vintage '70s box. You know the one... it has the cover with the bearded businessman and the lovely exotic lady standing behind him. That box art fascinated me as a child; there was a definite whiff of villainy about the pair of them. He looked like he'd just said, "Ah, I've been expecting you…" and was about to offer me a large sum of money to play his "game" - one where I'd attempt to escape his island whilst him and his team of genetically-altered monkeys hunted me down with crossbows.

My wife likes to play every now and then (Mastermind, that is). In all these years, I don't think I've ever managed to win against her. Maybe this version will help my game! Let's see.

Our resident Speccy Mastermind, Lee, has already explained the rules, so I'll jump right in. My first game left me a bit puzzled. I eventually had three pegs in the right place, but one peg was the right colour in the wrong place. If the other three were correct, I can't see how the remaining one could be in the wrong place. I was very interested to see the correct colour combination after I failed - but it didn't show me. Mmm… I call shenanigans!

For my second game, I tried the "easier" setting (colours not repeated). I lost a few times, but there was always a lingering sense of mistrust that the game was bugged. If you ask me, showing the correct combination at the end of a defeat is essential - otherwise I'm inclined to think I'm being cheated!

Did all these games help my board-game technique? Let's find out. It's 3am, so I'll go and wake up my wife, give her a game, and let you know.

Update: I won! She was pretty angry and groggy with sleep - but I wiped the floor with her. Looks like ZX Mastermind helped my game after all!

(posted from my couch)

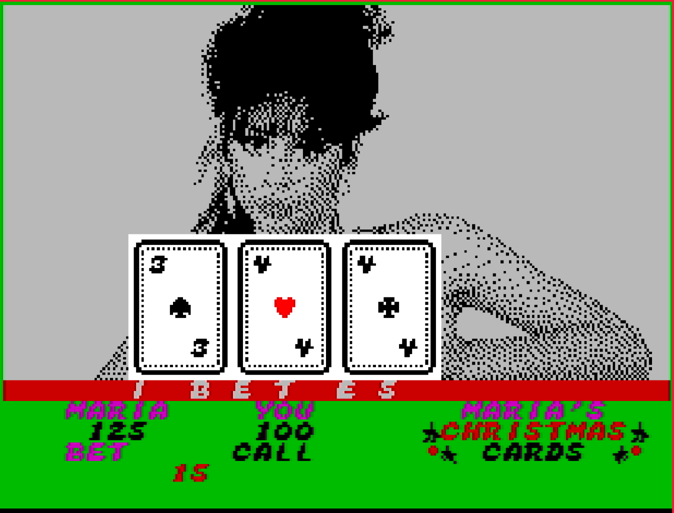
Maria's Christmas Cards

DF Design / Northern Games

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45002

PWYW / £2

During December 2025 I noticed that amongst the festive chocolates and other food items, many shops local to me had Easter Eggs proudly, or perhaps mockingly, on display. I guess one can never be too early, as a retailer, to remind consumers of what they should be spending their money on next. Maria's Christmas Cards is a cheeky reminder that Christmas is really just around the corner. *(Shaun wrote this in January - Ed)*



I'll never win with that pair.

Samantha Fox Pin-Up Poker (Break Space issue 2, page 73) was a fun and simplified card game released by the same development stable, and although it had its knockers, I quite liked it. What it did, it did well, simplifying a game of Poker to just three cards drawn. As I noted at the time, the phrase "I win with my pair" never seemed so apt.

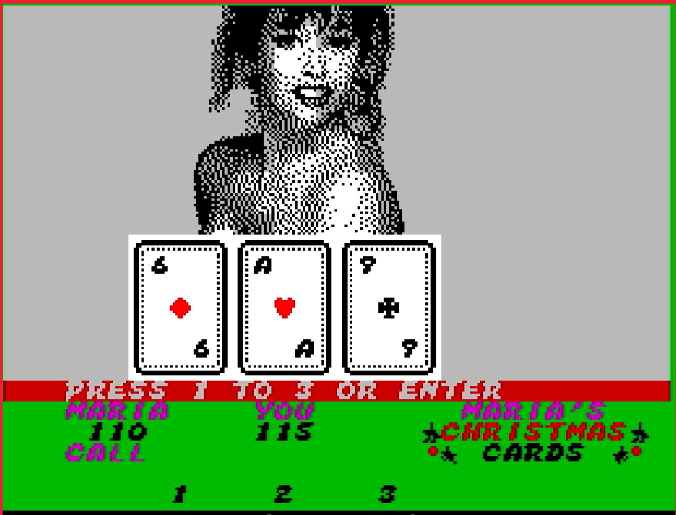
This release feels like more of the same, but featuring pixelated images of the 1980s model and Pop Singer Maria Whittaker. There are some subtle differences aside from visual virtues; there has been some technical house keeping such as an improved AI, as an example. As I note below, this one is harder.

The question then is Maria? Or Sam? We still have a three card simplified version of Poker, with nice assets, graphically speaking, and with title music being Christmas-themed in a bright Lee Bee type of way. Maria doesn't want you to win as much though, and on fumbling your hand, she gently suggests that you have a drink and lose that [Christmas] jumper.

I would have liked to have seen a five card Poker game to add some more depth to proceedings, but I guess depth is the last thing anyone wanting to play a strip poker game on an 8 bit computer is looking for.

Overall, Maria's Christmas Cards definitely rights the wrongs of Anco's 1988 release "Maria's Christmas Box", as she is much more nicely pixelated to the Speccy's screen. It's another solid release from DF Design and Northern Games. And like watching the 2003 Christmas film Elf in July, one must remember: it's never too early to get into the Christmas spirit. *(January! - Ed)*

Some of our readers, by virtue of being too young or not reading English tabloids in the 1980s, will have no idea who Maria is. She was a (much too) young lady who was greatly admired for her physical features.
Her career post-modelling was not as successful as her rival Sam Fox's, with just a couple of missable movie appearances and a pop single that didn't trouble the top 100.
But, she did marry none other than The Rebel MC with whom she has 3 kids. I bet they all sing 'The Rebel's heeeereee' when he gets home from the shops.



Gone bust?

Maria, you gotta see her. So sang Debbie Harry in Blondie's 1999 comeback smash hit "Maria". I'm not sure if she was singing about the charms of Wolf from Gladiator's Barbarian co-cover star Maria Whittaker, but if our Debs was a fan of the 8-bit scene, she may well have been. Ms Whittaker was a bit of a cult star on the home micros you see. Not only did she grace the cover of Palace's beat-em-up, but she was also the star of a game in her own right. 1988's "Maria's Christmas Box" wasn't great however - it was cheap in every sense, except its £9.95 price tag.

Fast forward to the (Christmas) present day and DF Design has set out to banish the disappointment of the original with something a little more classy. In doing so, they have served up a rather natty little package (oo-er) that is actually a lot of fun to play. I'd forgotten how much I really enjoy the thrill of a few hands of poker. While, like Shaun, I'd prefer a more complex version, such as Texas Hold 'em, the simplified 3 card game presented here provides a lot more accessibility. It gets you right into the action, even if you've never played the game before you can soon pick it up.

It's pretty addictive too, I've found myself coming back to it quite often for a few quick rounds on my downtime.

The sound effects and music are absolutely top notch. As you would expect from Rich "Tufty" Hollins on Beeper duty and Lee Bee on AY, you are in for a good time sonically whether playing in 48k or 128k mode. The digitised pics are clean (well y'know clean-ish!) and genuinely provide an incentive to win the whole pot and get to the next pic. (Though probably in a different way to how they would've when I was a more easy to please teenager. Ahem.)

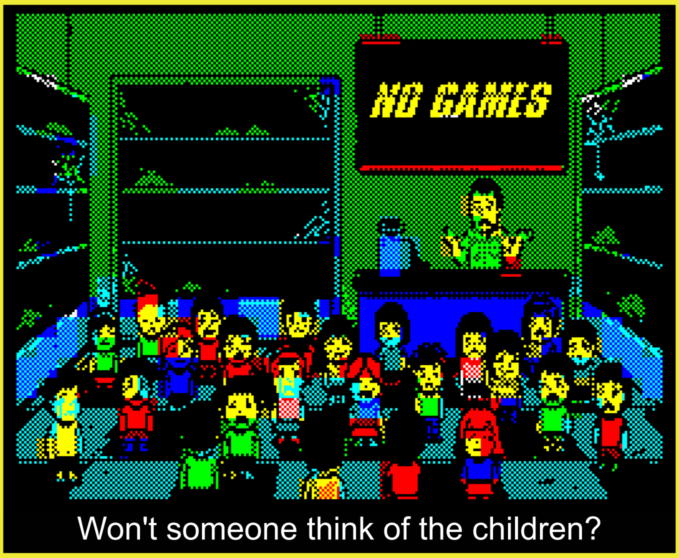
Given how dangerous and easily accessible the dark side of both gambling and smut has become in recent years, it's actually kinda wholesome to return to a time when the money was virtual and the filth was the softest of core. It's all good clean fun, with a hint of sauce and sure isn't that what Christmas is all about?

Bit 101 Saves Christmas

Isaías Díaz Toledano

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45195

PWYW / €2



Won't someone think of the children?

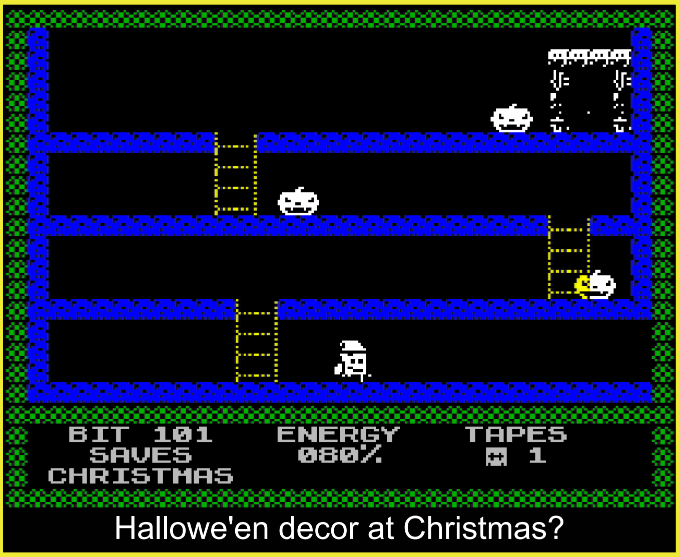
Here at BreakSpace Towers we strive for perfection. We pride ourselves on reviewing as many of the copious Speccy games that are released each quarter as we possibly can. Unfortunately however, in December 2025, faced with tight deadlines and eggnog overindulgence, a couple of Christmas crackers completely passed us by. As such we are now in the position where we're playing Xmas games out of season, a bit like listening to festive tunes such as 2009's Christmas number 1 "Killing in the Name of" in July.

Bit 101 Saves Christmas sees our hero, a friendly Android by the name of Bit 101, tasked by no less than Santa himself to retrieve the stolen master tapes of the latest games. If 'ol 101 fails, the poor kiddywinks will have nothing to play on Christmas day (booo).

All of which is the perfect excuse for an AGD-fueled platforming romp where you control a little robot dude who navigates various hazards in his quest to save Christmas. There are 4 tapes in total to collect. Each one is hidden deep within a sprawling world filled with all manner of nasties, including among other things, birds, weird zombie creatures, evil robot-looking things, ghosts, flying fish, toilet rolls, chameleons and those most festive of enemies, pumpkins!

Also standing in your way there's ice to skid on and lava and spikes to avoid. The layout of each room is well designed and it never feels unfair when you come a cropper. I am also a fan of having an energy that depletes when you touch a nasty rather than the frustrating insta-death that you get with the more hardcore platformers.

Although there is a lot of backtracking involved in retrieving the tapes from the 4 worlds, the challenge is fair and the game is very completable, just the sort of thing you want in a Christmas themed game. All of which has got me back in the Yuletide spirit, even though 25th of December is a distant memory. All together now, "Some of those that work forces…"



Hallowe'en decor at Christmas?

It's odd to be in a Christmassy mood nearing the end of the month of January; like putting your decorations and tree up in October, there is something not right about it. But then again, as a computer programmer, I often get Oct 31 and Dec 25 confused… I'm here all week.

By the time you are reading this review; a gentle opining about a fun 2D Christmas-titled flip-screen platform game, you may already be sick of our "Christmas in Spring" vibe here, with Maria's Christmas Cards also featuring this issue. Rage all you like: for this issue, Santa has paid us an early visit, depositing a couple of gifts to Break Space towers. We're all on the good list, it would seem.

BIT 101 Saves Christmas starts with our hero, an Elvish looking dude wearing a bobble hat (surely knitted by his Nan) needing to collect some hidden tapes (of which there are four in total), returning all to a mailbox (presumably Santa's) one at a time. (Someone didn't read the instructions again, did they Shaun? Ed). This reminds me when I'd need to frantically search the house to return my Blockbuster rentals. The late fee here is disappointed children, though.

Two versions exist, catering for both main reversions of the Speccy. The AY music included, whilst not Christmas Number One material (hey, remember those?), nor does it sound akin to any Festive music I've heard, but it matches the explorer platform vibe of the game very well. The difference between the 48K and 128K game is the addition of a game over splash screen depicting numerous disappointed children for the big boy Speccy.

I really like this game; each path to find the four master tapes starts by entering mystical cave portals. One has a kind of spooky Hallowe'en feel to it (so it looks like I'm not the only one to confuse Oct 31 and Dec 25 then?), another has roaming toilet rolls and flying fish, because why not? A third has bats and some critters to avoid. And the final zone is kind of space age looking, with miniature War of the World-ish creatures I guess. Either way, it's kind of Christmas in name only really, but still enough for me to pine for Chocolates, Prosecco and Mince Pies for breakfast. And it's much better than the two weeks of leftover Turkey too!

CRONOSOFT

A brief history of Cronosoft - an analogue publisher in a digital age

Since the early 2000s, extreme Ironing enthusiast and all-around top bloke Simon Ullyatt has been on a mission: to publish new software for his independent label Cronosoft for some of the most popular 1980s home computers, and even some obscure systems from the past. Shaun finds out more.

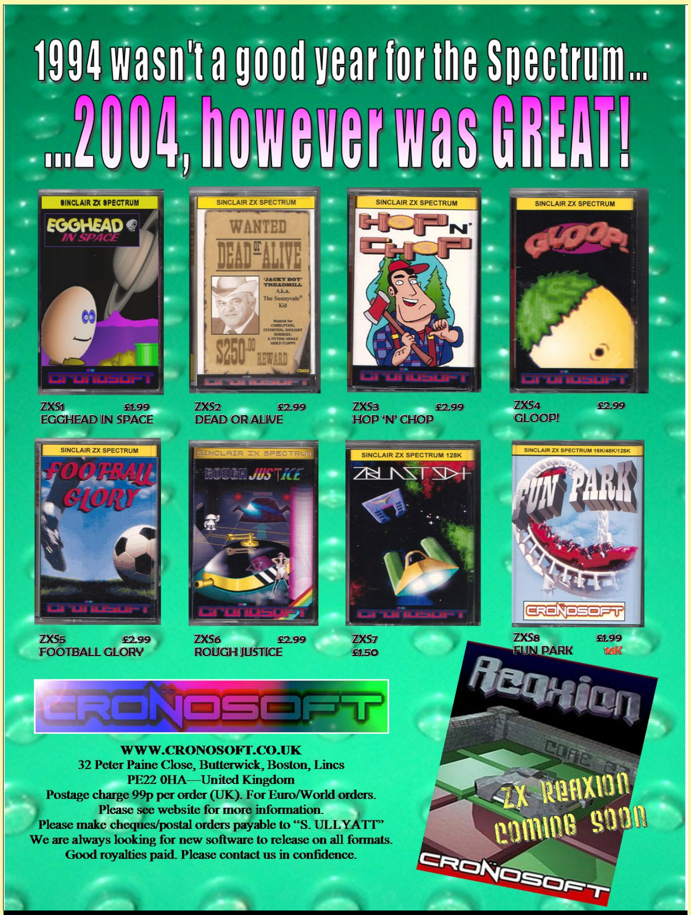
The early years

Simon Ullyatt has always had a soft spot for 8-bit home computers, and was once an editor of a fanzine supporting the Oric platform, an obscurity from the 1980s, an urban myth, and a machine that many ended up with after asking for a Sinclair ZX Spectrum for Christmas. As he recalls, “At the start of the millennium, I used to edit a fanzine for the Oric called Rhetoric, which followed on from the long running Oric User Monthly mag. By 2002 however, time was running out for it, and I found myself looking for something else to occupy my time.”

The big idea

Being a child of that great decade, Simon had a big dream, more than just being the editor of a magazine (Mpk might want to take note).

“From the days at school in the ‘80s, I’d always dreamed of ‘being’ a software house, and wondered if there was a market out there for one, where people could get their creations out on real cassettes again - for the first time since around 1994”. And, lucky for him, and the rest of us, there was. But whilst he had the determination to publish wares on tape, he didn’t have the necessary skills to do so.



ZXS1 £1.99 EGGHEAD IN SPACE
ZXS2 £2.99 DEAD OR ALIVE
ZXS3 £2.99 HOP ‘N’ CHOP
ZXS4 £2.99 GLOOP!
ZXS5 £2.99 FOOTBALL GLORY
ZXS6 £2.99 ROUGH JUSTICE
ZXS7 £1.50
ZXS8 £1.99 FUN PARK 16K

WWW.CRONOSOFT.CO.UK
32 Peter Paine Close, Butterwick, Boston, Lincs
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We are always looking for new software to release on all formats.
Good royalties paid. Please contact us in confidence.

Egghead 3 led a highly productive first year

“I’m a crap programmer. I did do COBOL at university (the year before they switched to C++). I always fancied doing a bit of Spectrum programming, but other than writing stuff in BASIC and compiling it with Softek’s IS & FP compilers, I haven’t done anything worthy!”

Simon soon found something worthy, thanks to a throw-away post on the once popular World of Spectrum (WoS) forums, as veteran Speccy programmer Jonathan Cauldwell offered Cronosoft *Egghead in Space*, the third in a series of games which debuted in 1989 on a cover tape of a popular mag for the rubber keyed monolith.

“The game’s predecessors, Egghead 1 and 2, had appeared on Crash cover tapes, but this game was an unreleased one that he’d written. I knocked up a bit of a crappy inlay card on Deluxe Paint IV on the Amiga, and inkjet printed it. I mentioned it on the WoS site, and blimey…. some people bought it. More games arrived shortly afterwards. *Dead or Alive*, *Gloop!*, *Rough Justice* - all from Jonathan, as well as some other titles for other machines.” And with this, Cronosoft, the now famous independent 8-bit publisher, was born.

FORTY NINER
FORTY NINER
FORTY NINER
ROCKET MAN
ZX80 PREMIUM
THE MANDARIN
PALETOJONES
ENCYCLOPAEDIA GALACTICA
SPACE DISPOSAL
JET SCOUT
CURSED CATACOMBS
BIGG OIL CO.
ONE LITTLE GHOST
SUPER PROGRAMS 9
LUMASCII

Cronosoft titles on display at a convention. Come and get 'em.

SAVE Me

In those early days, sales were limited by a manual duplication process.

“I had to copy each cassette manually by saving it out on my Spectrum”, Simon said with a shudder, remembering those arduous days, “I maybe sold 10-20 copies of each title to begin with. It was a time when you could get blank tapes for pennies, and I could manage to cover the ‘home manufacturing’, pay a 50p royalty, and still sell the game at a price of £1.99 - Nobody made any substantial amounts… maybe enough for a few pints and a packet of Rolos.” he more fondly recalls. This was back in late 2002 through to 2003 when you could procure a packet of Rolos for 50p.

Cronosoft managed to publish some excellent releases back then, mostly for the ZX Spectrum, but as his label established itself, the Commodore C64 and even the odd Amstrad CPC game appeared. In 2004 came one of Simon’s favourites, and it is for the oft-forgotten 16K Speccy too. “*Fun Park* was a masterpiece of 16K Speccy programming and I can still spend hours playing that”, he recalls fondly. Another of his favourites is from the redoubtable Bob Smith, Z80 coder extraordinaire who made Sinclair’s monochrome ZX81 seem like a gaming powerhouse. But it’s Smith’s Speccy game that he still has a soft spot for: “*Farmer Jack and the Hedge Monkeys*, a take on one of my favourite arcade games, *Ladybug*.” Simon recalled. And as for other machines, he cites Astro Nell, a masterpiece for the unexpanded VIC-20 computer, as being up there as some of Cronosoft’s best.

Jupiter ACE

A different Kind of Ace

As well as the Spectrum, Cronosoft supports the very obscure 1980s computer known as the Jupiter Ace with two cassette releases, *Tut Tut* and a port of the famous *3D Monster Maze*.

The Jupiter Ace is a monochrome machine released in late 1982, designed by Richard Altwasser and Dr Steven Vickers, both formerly working at Sinclair Research. The computer itself was aimed at the hobbyist market and sadly didn’t do too well. It came bundled with the computer language Forth which had many technical advantages over the more popular BASIC interpreter included with most home computers of the era. Despite these cassettes being on sale for some time now, scant few have actually sold. Surely a future eBay rarity?

After heartily speaking about some of Simon’s favourite games, our chat quickly turned to some of his mistakes, for which there were a few: “*Dead or Alive*, I think this was probably the 2nd or 3rd game release. There wasn’t a loading screen for the game, so I knocked one up using Deluxe Paint and converted it to a Speccy loading screen. I messed around with the loader and I foolishly put an OVER 1 command in the code. Little did I know until after I’d sent out plenty of copies, that it corrupted the scoreboard when the game was playing. There have been other issues too. *Rough Justice* wouldn't play on a Spectrum 128K +2B I think."

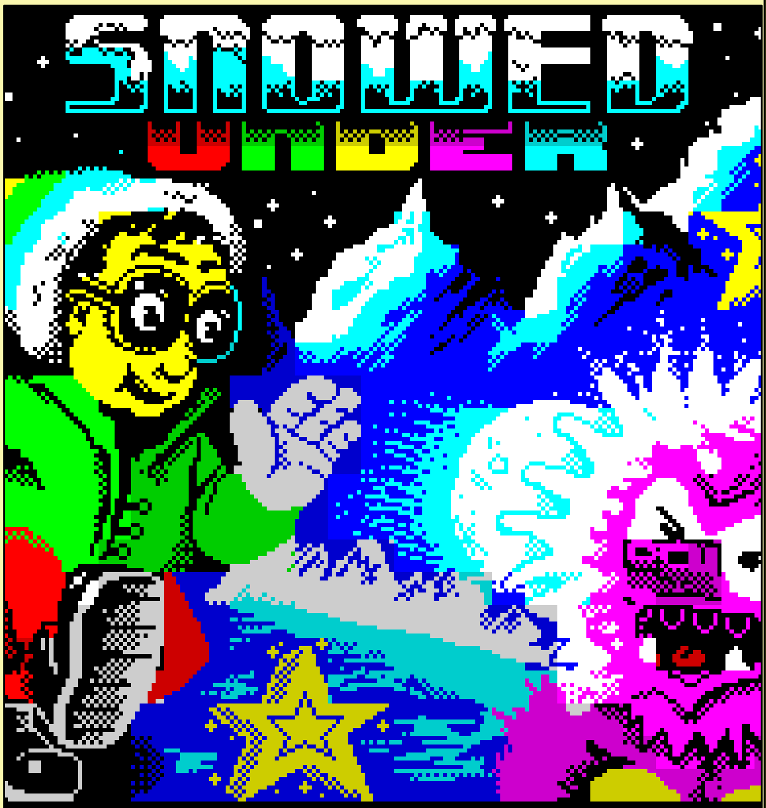
Turning Heads

In January 2004, something happened; a magazine called Retro Gamer (RG) launched from the now defunct Live Publishing. This was initially all about nostalgia, but it soon started to cover outfits like Cronosoft. Then Cronosoft got noticed by a more general media. "Word did get about, and ended up getting mentions in some 'grown up' media outlets, such as The Independent, BBC, Guardian etc. Heaven knows why, as if they knew how small and amateur the whole outfit was, they probably wouldn't have been interested. We have bedroom coders of course, but bedroom software houses?" Still, it showed the cultural significance of machines beyond a small group of enthusiasts outside of specialist forums and newsgroups (comp.sys.sinclair, anyone?).

Simon remembers this era most vividly, "those early years around 2002-2005 were interesting, as 'retro' started to become a thing. The start of Retro Gamer magazine, the early shows such as the two C.G.E. (Classic Gaming Expo) in Croydon that we had a stall at - that kind of thing indicated what was to come. Back then, you could go around a car boot sale and pick up a Spectrum 128K and a suitcase full of games for £5 - it has now grown at such a rate, that there is so much more interest today."

Retro goes mainstream

Many of Cronosoft's early releases are now considered retro in their own right, but one could argue with modern implementations and re-imaginings of these old 8-bit systems, it's like when Vinyl became the coolest thing again.
As a self-proclaimed bedroom publisher, it has caught the attention again of several influential platforms (as well as influencers). "We had a six page feature in Retro Gamer (issue 166 I think, the one with the Road Rash cover), and plenty of reviews in there, and in Micro Mart when that was still printed." (I do miss Micro Mart… sob - Shaun).



Snowed Under by a Charity Release

Whilst EggHead III remains Cronosoft's best selling title, the 2021 Christmas and charity release Snowed Under did exceptionally and unexpectedly well, raising just shy of £1,000 for Shelter and causing some stress for Simon as the orders stacked up.

The game was a collaboration and used Jonathan Cauldwell's excellent game-making tool Arcade Game Designer.
One of the contributors to this endeavour was Allan Turvey, one of the best Speccy games programmers around today. Allan runs HighRise Software with many releases credited to it, as well as publishing about his Z80 coding through Patreon. Information about his other releases may be found at http://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/list?label_id=18072.

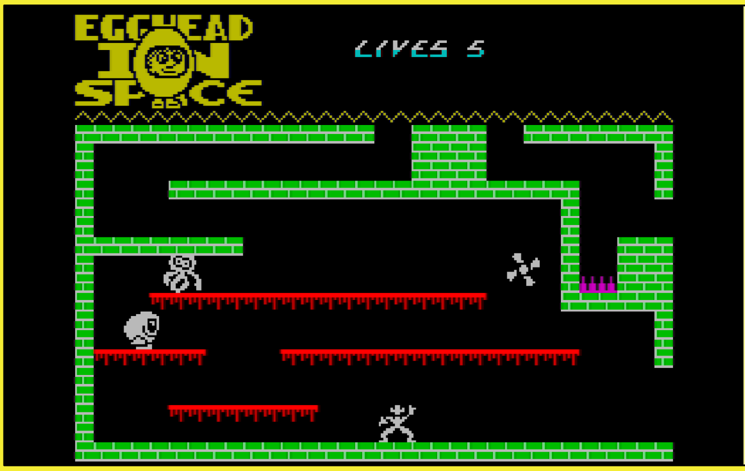
Other contributors to Snowed Under are Andy Johns, Gabriele Amore, Jarrod Bentley, Craig Howard, Pedro Pimenta, and Sergey Kosov.

"I've met quite a lot of the gaming scene's YouTubers (Kim Justice, Ashens, Larry Bundy Jr., Nostalgia Nerd, Villordsutch). Nostalgia Nerd covered Fun Park in one of his videos, and we know Alys (Kim Justice) quite well - she often mentions us, which is nice."

With Cronosoft now having such a strong portfolio of 8-bit titles, some modern day classics for sure, is it considering 16-bit software too? "I've always fancied doing something for the Atari ST or Commodore Amiga, but have never been offered anything. 8-bit is where it's at though for me. If anything, I'm regressing slightly, and trying to be the most prolific ZX81 and ZX80 publisher. I love the obscure - even the Jupiter Ace and Mattel Aquarius are supported now."
We're big fans of Cronosoft at BreakSpace, go check them out at http://cronosoft.fwscart.com. Tell them we sent you and be charged double.

Six of the Best

Shaun's pick of the top six Cronosoft titles



EggHead 3: EggHead in Space

This was Cronosoft's first big release and launched not just this retro modern publisher, but led to EggHead being something of a mainstay character throughout the post-commercial and revival of the Speccy as a viable gaming platform.

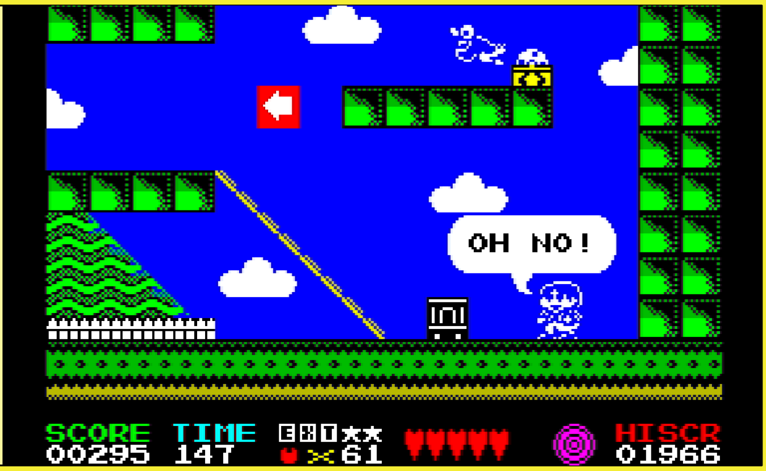
From the brilliant mind of the redoubtable Jonathan Cauldwell, this is a nifty platform game developed in the early 2000s, and released in December 2002 in a step towards what Cauldwell calls "Monty Mole type games". Its strength is in its playability, with clear enhancements over previous EggHead titles. It also broke the mold of "new" games using the Jet Set Willy engine that happened during the lull from 1994, giving Speccy fans a fresh new challenge to boot.

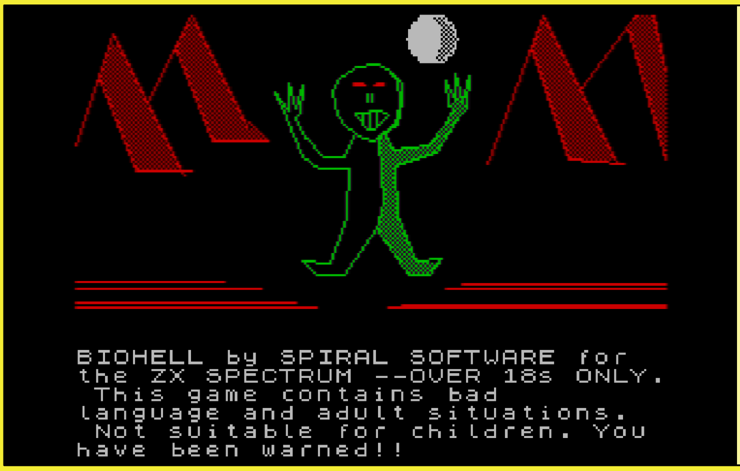
Hop'N'Chop

The last Shaw Brother's game that would have been lost to time had it not been for Ullyatt and his crazy idea to release physical cassettes for the rubber keyed monolith.

This is a cute-em-up style platformer with obvious nods to Rainbow Islands, but in the more "manly" Lumberjack trade (starring Jack Lumber… groan). Also, cue that Monty Python sketch.

Once you get used to the controls, this is a rather fun game: chop down trees, avoid the mutant but cute looking nasties, and return the logs which happens all in a day's work. This is very much in the vein of late Speccy budget gaming, but one of the good ones.




```
BIOHELL by SPIRAL SOFTWARE for
the ZX SPECTRUM --OVER 18s ONLY.
 This game contains bad
language and adult situations.
 Not suitable for children. You
have been warned!!
```

Biohell

The late Andy Remic (RIP), a British author and an indie film maker of note, turned his considerable writing skills to making his epic book of the same name into a graphical/text adventure for the old Speccy.

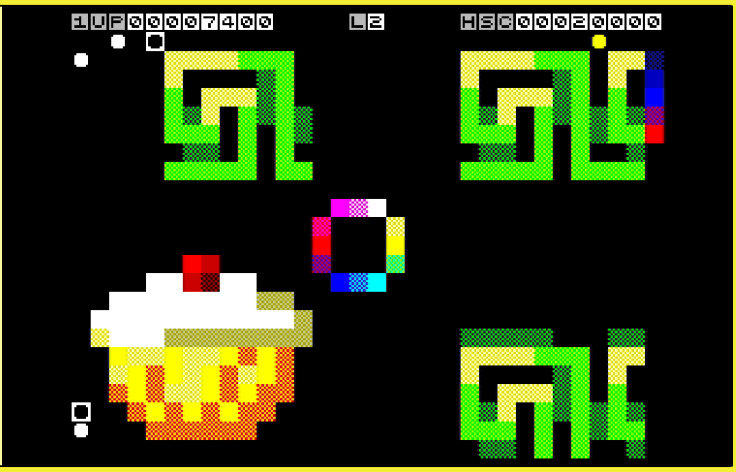
This game is known for its excellent prose and gritty storyline in which you are anti-hero Franco Haggis; your task is to battle against various AIs, aliens and deadly mutant zombies using a command parser and your wits. And although the graphics are somewhat lacking, it's all about the hellish storyline that grabs you.

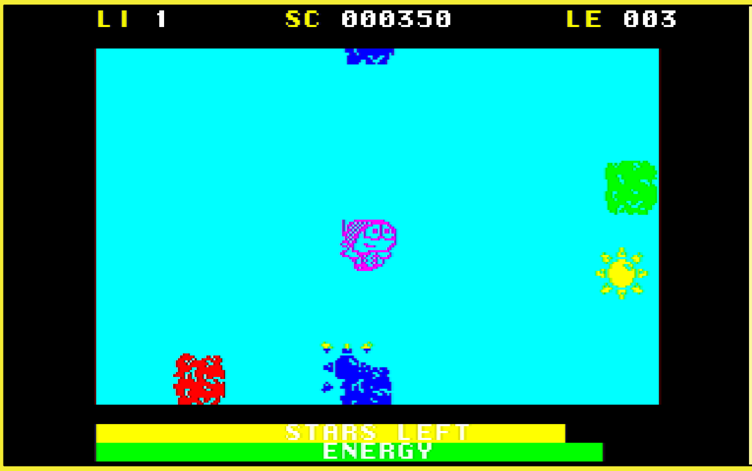
It's one of the few games on the ZX to include an 18+ warning on the cassette inlay, so keep out of reach of children!

splATTR!

If you want your graphics big, bold, blocky, and colourful, you don't need a Commodore C64… you need splATTR, an epic, frantic shoot-em up which can cause sensory overload; it is developed by the brilliant Bob Smith. This is perhaps the most simple premise of any game: if it moves, shoot it. If it doesn't, shoot it. If it drains your energy, move. That's it.

Showing Bob's pedigree (and there are many other releases that do just this), splATTR! is an unapologetic blast fest for the 128K machines. Bold, fast paced and pure arcade fun, like a caffeine rush that lasts and without the crash either! Blummin' brilliant, I say.





BipBoi

Rob Pearmain's BipBoi is one of those "pick up and play" affairs that can grab you for 10 minutes or 2 hours. Each level is a single screened event in which you control BipBoi or one of his friends, Maddo or Beanie, all of whom have unique abilities.

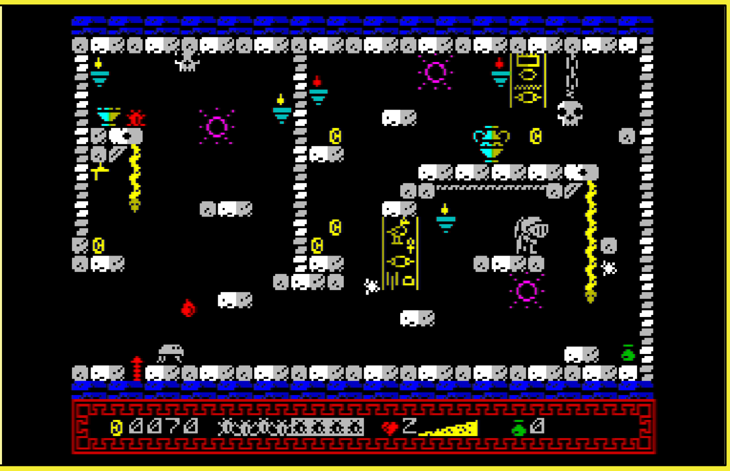
Save Bipworld by collecting the stars and avoiding the roaming on-screen scum in a game that requires a little bit of learning and sharp reactions.

The graphics are fast paced and cute, and there are many levels to play through, providing a nice progressive challenge with a subtle, some might say soft, learning curve.

Pyramid Escape

The Spectrum Computing archives list five "Escape" games in this great trilogy, and although two of which is for the ZX Spectrum Next, all of which are really quite spiffy. Pyramid Escape is the latest game - at least the latest that works on the OG 48K hardware - though the more up market Speccy version includes some excellent AY music.

Silky smooth graphics and sharp controls greet you, dear reader, in a slickly executed production by IrataHack and friends. It's one of the better explorer 2D platform adventure games (we've been rather spoilt over recent past years, haven't we?) in which you are cast into the mystical and ancient Pyramids. It's definitely one for your collection.



Fave Three

We asked Simon about his three favourite games, all for the ZX Spectrum, and why he loves them so much.

Minder (DK'Tronics) - Don Priestley (R.I.P.) was a master of Spectrum coding with his Trapdoor/Popeye type games, yet this game - whilst unimpressive at first glance - has a wealth of humour, depth and pure enjoyment. I've played that game more than any other.

Skool Daze / Bak 2 Skool (Microsphere) (That's two games!) - One of the most complex sandbox type games ever made in 48K of memory. It's a whole world of school happening in a few screens, pretty much done by a bedroom coder, with a little help from his wife and neighbour.

Atic Atac (Ultimate Play the Game) - The first arcade quality game I saw outside of an arcade. Whilst not really very original in concept, it showed us what could be done on a humble Speccy back in 1983, while everyone else was releasing endless clones of Pac-Man and Frogger. It's also one of the only games I have completed!

Got a Game? Get it Published!

I bet you are wondering, "So, what's the deal to get my 8-bit game published through Cronosoft?". Here's what you need to know, straight from the Horse's mouth.

"I do tend to concentrate on the Sinclair machines, as it's much easier to duplicate and release the games quickly, and that's where Cronosoft is best known."

"I get offered games every now and then, or in some cases, speak to the IP owner for some titles (such as the ZX81 games by Software Farm). Normally, programmers are happy to let me release the games with either no royalty, or a small royalty for each one sold. Sometimes, I do charity releases, such as Snowed Under, or with the Forest Escape, Pyramid Escape and Xmas Shapeshifter titles. I am essentially not-for-profit, though that's not to say that I don't generate funds - I don't take a wage, and just cover expenses and future costs."
Find out more through http://www.facebook.com/cronosoftgames

WIN!
Actual Physical Prizes from

That's right - our pals at Cronosoft are offering our readers the chance to win 5 games on tape.

To enter, simply send us a explanation of why *you* deserve to win.

We'll choose the most convincing or amusing or otherwise remarkable entries and may print them in the next issue.

Send your entry to our email address : breakspaceinbox@gmail.com

Winner(s) announced next issue.

Poetry Corner

In honour of our QL feature, we present a special poem.

Quentin's lips,
quivering loosely,
question Lisa
quite lavaciously.

Quoth Lisa :
'Quit leering,
queerly low-
quality lad!'

Quixotic lush
Quentin looks
quietly lessened,
queries life.

-Anon

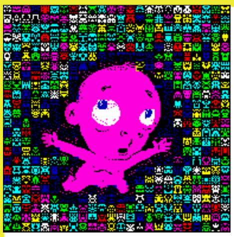
Vice City Blues

Mario Armao Ferreira

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45308

Free

Break Space Ace



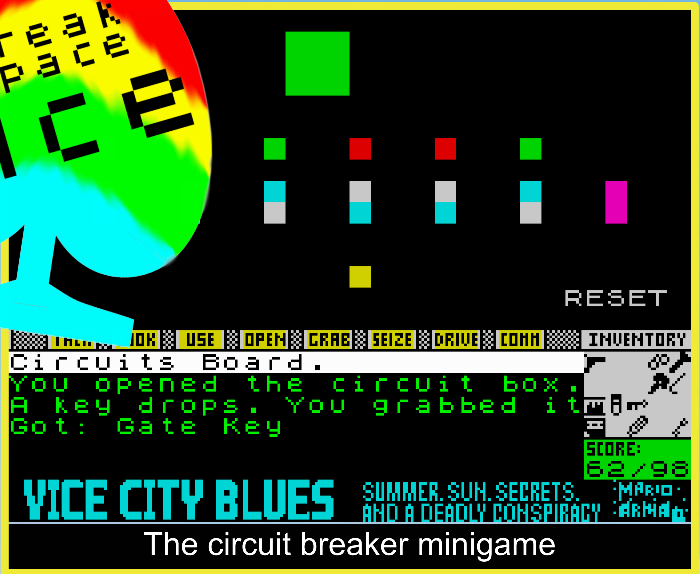
Your name is Alex Reed, you are 32 and single, or so says the game's introductory blurb that reads like a lonely heart's ad. It's a graphic adventure where you start as a regular police officer on patrol in Vice City. Events develop following a hunch you have about a curious warehouse robbery in which nothing was stolen but something was left.

Author Mario returned to Spectrum coding early last year, and has since been publishing a steady stream of varied compiled BASIC games. This one builds on previous releases, and it cites LucasArts' SCUMM interface and Police Quest as inspirations. Though it's more accurate to describe the gameplay as 'point & investigate' rather than 'point & click', and with no player sprite to control, there's more in common with Vera Cruz than Monkey Island.

With lots of splash screens, animated cutscenes and minigames, Vice City Blues is 128K-only and multiload for good reason. The adventure is spread over several working days, each one with a separate load, so snapshot users beware: remember where you are on the tape!

Day 1 starts off at the station, where the only thing you and your colleagues will be shooting is the breeze, the only thing searched is your locker, and the only thing brandished is a breathalyser. So far so quotidian, but you do get to go out in the patrol car to receive 911s and code-141s, to which you reply "10-4 Central"—and that's more than you'd get to do walking the beat in Barnsley.

Play your cards (or rather – the game) right, and you are promoted to detective, meaning you can drop the squad car and jump in the Ferrari Testarossa—because presumably you need to keep a low profile when working in plain clothes. And speaking of clothes, the game doesn't detail what our civvies are, but I'm picturing a fetching jacket & jeans combo, sleeves rolled up, aviators, and a mullet that would make Rudi Voller blush.

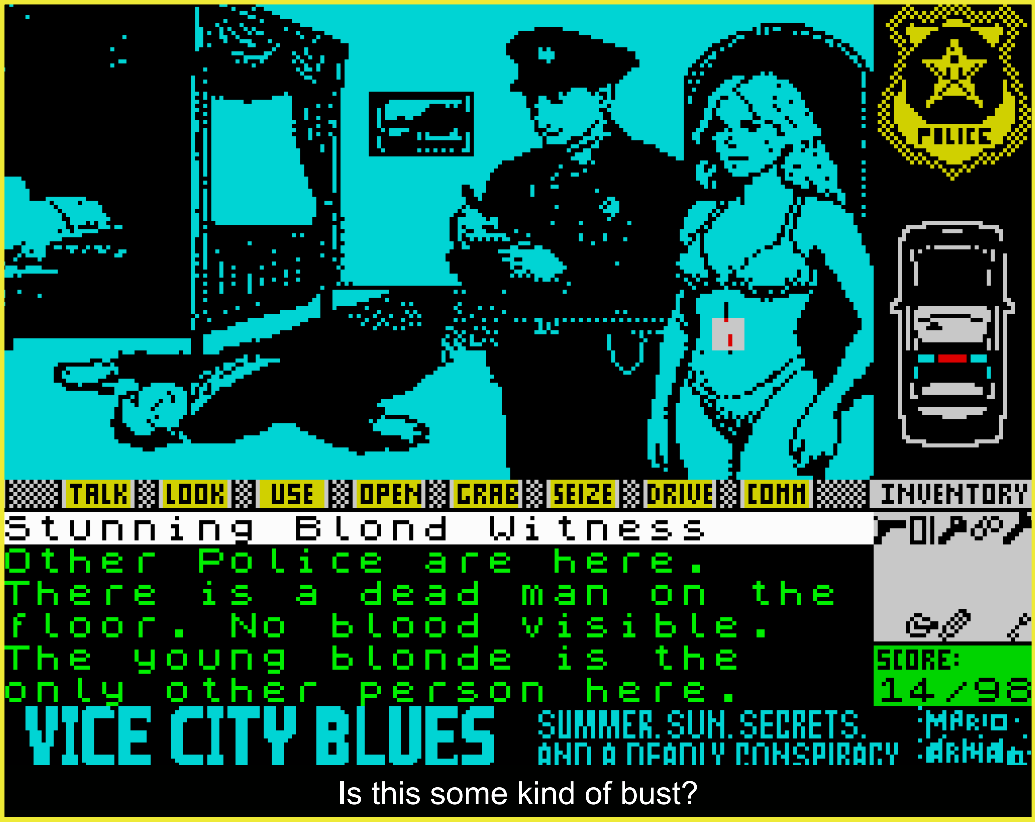

RESET
TALK LOOK USE OPEN GRAB SEIZE DRIVE COMM INVENTORY
SCORE:
62/98
VICE CITY BLUES
SUMMER. SUN. SECRETS. AND A DEADLY CONSPIRACY
MARIO ARMAO

Circuits Board.
You opened the circuit box.
A key drops. You grabbed it
Got: Gate Key

The circuit breaker minigame

As the plot unfolds over 3 days, you'll meet a beautiful blonde in a bikini, encounter shady dealings, murders and drug trafficking, but where does it all lead? Could it be to the rather ominous sounding corporation called well... Omnicorp? Well, with perseverance you'll find out, because Vice City Blues has a linear story arc and you can't go far wrong. This may be a design decision reacting to the cooler response players had to his previous game, Quivera. Whatever the reason, it's a decision that works well, as do the several minigames that break up the drama and give you something fresh to scratch your head over.

This isn't a game to play for an eloquent storyline, faultless translation or fully-formed characters. Just enjoy it for what it is—a knowing cheese-fest in the Miami Vice vein. And yes, you do get to hold a gun and say "FREEZE PUNK!"


POLICE
TALK LOOK USE OPEN GRAB SEIZE DRIVE COMM INVENTORY
SCORE:
14/98
VICE CITY BLUES
SUMMER. SUN. SECRETS. AND A DEADLY CONSPIRACY
MARIO ARMAO

Stunning Blond Witness
Other Police are here.
There is a dead man on the floor. No blood visible.
The young blonde is the only other person here.

Is this some kind of bust?

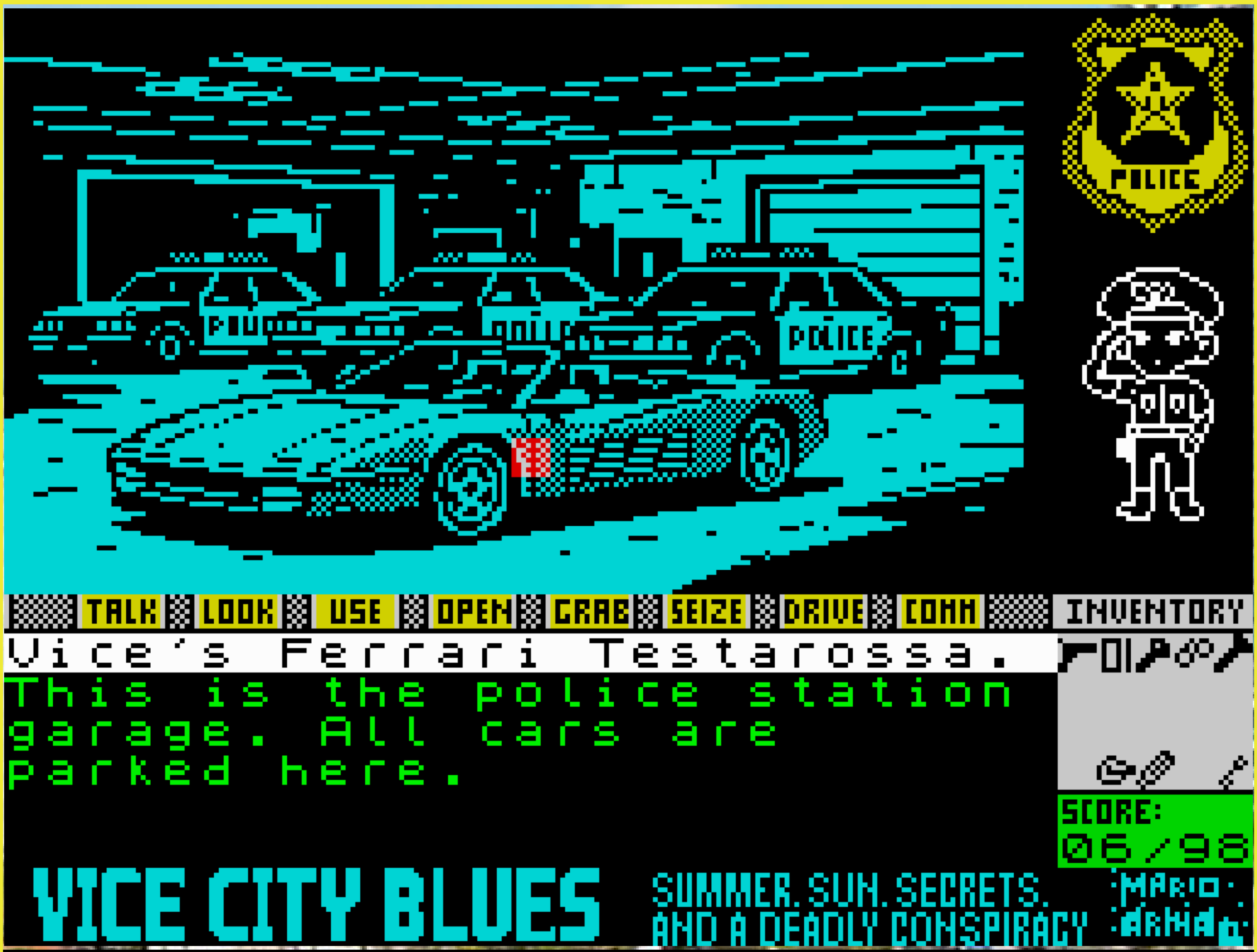
Watching American Cop movies and TV shows growing up oft times set off my imagination; gritty police work with the “Serve and Protect” mantra reinforced mentally, though sometimes through grey areas of moral quandary. In Vice City Blues I need to step up and take on the role of the most 1980s looking cop ever to grace the Sinclair ZX Spectrum: Alex Reed, complete with his cop looking moustache!

As noted by my esteemed colleague Dave, this is a linear graphical adventure which builds on a backstory telling of a break in that left behind a strange soaked item. This whole incident didn’t sit well with Alex, with his cop instincts kicking in.

He began his investigation into this strange 911 incident, and all roads pointed to a large organisation called Omnicorp.

The game proper then begins a year after these events with a menu-driven styled gameplay. Select an action and then move around a cursor to enact. I find this a tad sluggish at times, but it is nonetheless intuitive. Each part of the game needs to be essentially solved before you can move to the next scene. And the ordering is logical, with the story unfolding methodically. I am now, through this spiffy title, living an American cop TV show! Splendid.

The graphics and presentation adds to the whole package, with an excellent AY score on the eye catching title screen. Although this is practically a monochrome affair, everything is well defined. Overall, it is a thoughtfully progressive game that is crafted to a high standard. More of the same, please!



Vice's Ferrari Testarossa.

This is the police station garage. All cars are parked here.

Very nice, but at least my Micra has a roof.

Unless you're the sort of weirdo that reads the third review first, you'll know by now that Vice City Blues simply bleeds 80s US cop show nostalgia.

I love it when someone tries something the ZX Spectrum wasn't really designed for. Even though this sort of ambitious menu driven "interactive movie" caper is generally the preserve of its 16-bit cousins, somehow Mário Armão Ferreira has pulled it off on a 128k Speccy.

Personally I have to admit that I've never really been into the trial & error element of these types of games and there are some frustrating sections, especially near the start. Once you get into the flow of it however things start to (point and) click. You just need to attune your brain to the logic of it and realise that there's an order to proceedings, either that or try absolutely everything until something works!

You can see for yourself the level of polish of the screenshots and the thought of seeing what the next screen holds is a real driving factor to motivate you to solve the puzzles before you. Some are logical, some are obtuse but with enough time & patience all are solvable. Without wanting to give spoilers, the end result is every bit as rewarding for the player as the protagonist. Book 'em Danno!

Musical Intervals and Scales Tester

Dominic White

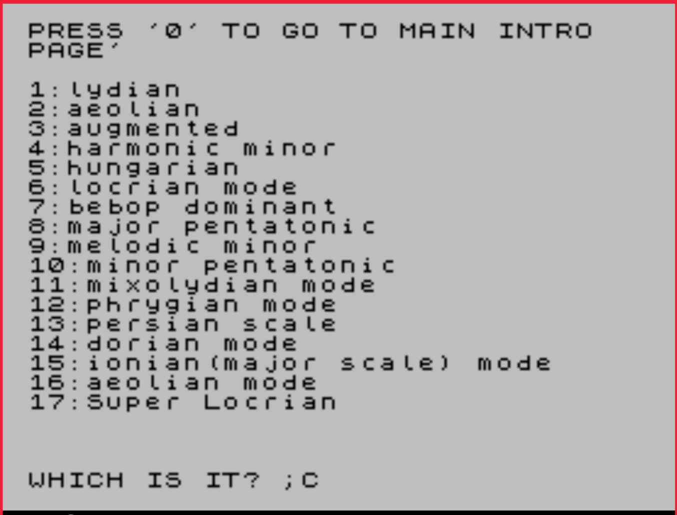
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45171

Free

Honestly, never have I been so confident in picking up a review before even loading the software. It's about music intervals, and as a mostly self-taught guitarist of many years, and someone who has always been able to play by ear, I thought this would be easy. Who needs to learn what a minim or a dotted minim is? Just pick up the instrument and play it. Right? You only need to know how to count to four, and what notes go together to construct chords. And for guitar, the only scale that's required is the pentatonic scale, surely.

Okay, my hyperbole misses out the fact that I did have about half a dozen lessons in which I first learnt to count to four (so I got the most difficult thing out of the way); secondly, I learnt the blues progression, or the three chord theory. During that time, and ever since, I was just playing by ear; Hendrix, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Pearl Jam, Nirvana. If I heard it, I'd soon be able to play it, mostly. I was also the go-to guy for keeping things in tune, and would know if anyone was out of tune.

On loading Music Intervals and Scale Tester, I noted that this was a BASIC listing. RUNning the programme gives you three options: a short read me type explanation, a scale tester, and the main game.



```
PRESS '0' TO GO TO MAIN INTRO
PAGE'

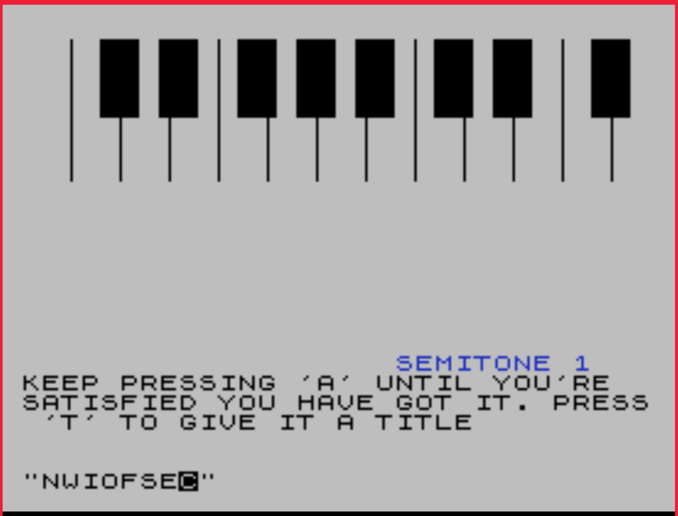
1:lydian
2:aeolian
3:augmented
4:harmonic minor
5:hungarian
6:locrian mode
7:bebop dominant
8:major pentatonic
9:melodic minor
10:minor pentatonic
11:mixolydian mode
12:phrygian mode
13:persian scale
14:dorian mode
15:ionian(major scale) mode
16:aeolian mode
17:Super Locrian


WHICH IS IT? ;C
```

Changing my name to *Bebop Dominant*

Firstly, I selected the explanation. It described how musical notes are separated by semi-tones. So far, so good. After this, it will play two notes and ask you to "name" them - this is important as, on my first try, I gave them nonsense names and, when the game proper started, I couldn't remember what any of those meant. So heads up: if it plays C# and then C, call it something like "C SHARP THEN C", rather than OIJREJD. Because when the game starts, random notes are heard and you're asked to select from the titles you have given each grouping.

Then I got into the Scaler Tester. As I mentioned above, I know the Pentatonic scale (or more precisely, the Minor variant). But now I see 17 listed, the rest of which I've never heard of. What's the Super Locrian scale? Well, I guessed my way through, and after many rounds, I started to learn something. Yet more information that I'm attaining through computer software. So if you, like me, are a long time musician who is basically musically illiterate but can nonetheless play one or more instruments, this is for you. It's a fair enough challenge for anyone; only classy musicians will be acing this hearing test!



```
                   SEMITONE 1
KEEP PRESSING 'A' UNTIL YOU'RE
SATISFIED YOU HAVE GOT IT. PRESS
 'T' TO GIVE IT A TITLE

"NWIOFSE█"
```

Not a good naming scheme.

Musical Intervals And Scales Tester the Game is a music-based game for the Spectrum. Don't get excited, AY chip fans—this is strictly a basic affair using the famously unmusical BEEP command.

Do you know your Mixolydian from your Phrygian? I certainly don't. (Although, aren't these modes rather than scales? And are all the scales in this game actually in "C"?)

If I've lost you, it's because I've lost myself. All my knowledge of music theory comes from eavesdropping on my son's piano class. I play guitar like Red Dwarf's Lister. I learnt the A minor pentatonic in first position twenty years ago, only to discover it's now considered the "Boomer shape."

In any case, this game has a 2-option menu.

Explanation – which will make your eyes bleed with liberal use of the flash effect.

The Game – which made my ears cry for Momma.

It's not the author's fault; the BEEP command just sounds sour to me, no matter what.

For the record: The C major scale is C D E F G A B C. Mixolydian is C D E F G A B♭ C. Good luck telling the difference on a Spectrum!

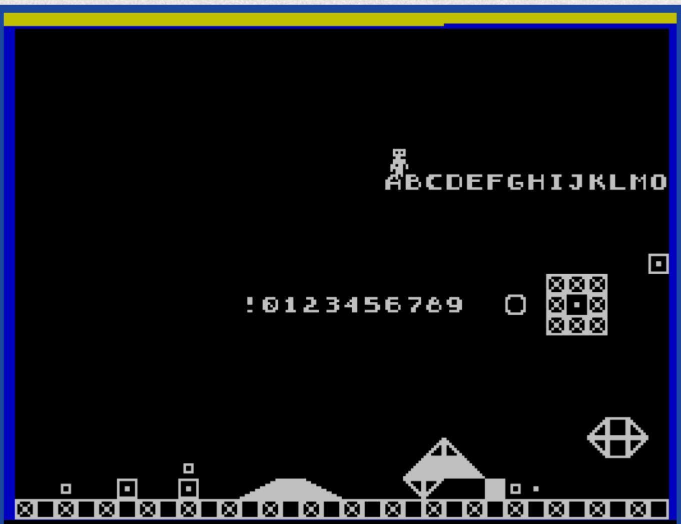
All in all, this is a novel BASIC listing, nicely presented—exactly the kind of thing I secretly love. Unwittingly, it illustrates the gulf between what we hoped, in the 80s, the Spectrum might be : a useful tool, and what it actually was: a kooky bag of mad fun.

Tiny Tim ZX

Calint

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45188

Free



Word Salad

There are several famous “Tiny Tims” throughout history. There’s Bob Cratchit’s son, of course, heart-rendingly portrayed by Robin the Frog in A Muppet Christmas Carol (a marvellously understated performance and one of Robin’s finest roles to date). There was also… well, I think that’s all of them. Until now, that is! Welcome Tiny Tim ZX! Will this Timothy steal the crown as the most famous Tiny Tim of all time? Let’s find out!

What the Dickens IS this? An oddity of a game, and no mistake! The play area is filled with numbers, letters, and strange symbols - like a Carol Vorderman fever dream. You control Tim using A and D to move, and G to jump. It’s an unusual keyboard combination and feels a bit unnatural (just like the rest of the game). The title character seems to have very little, if anything, to do with Tim Cratchit, although there is one similarity… this Tim moves around as if he’s on crutches too!

As you stumble around trying to figure out what on earth you should be doing, you soon come across a mysterious message slap-dab in the middle of the playing screen:

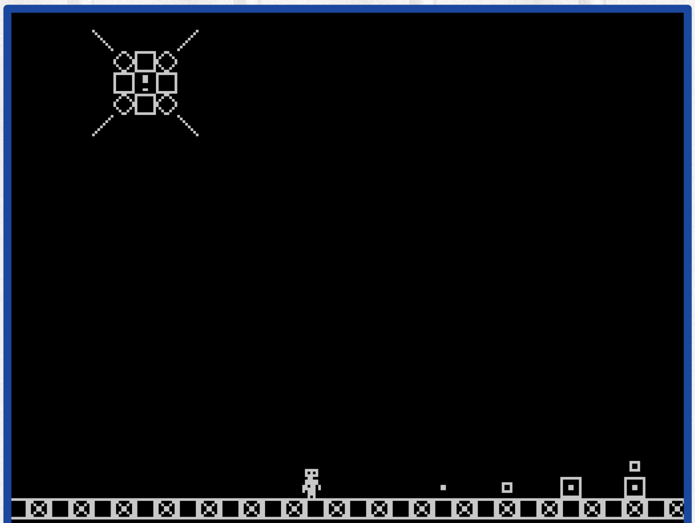
U R IN ROOME
U C ME
EXITS: NONE
TODO - FIND AN EXIT

A code? A clue? Or just bad English? And if there isn’t an exit, why should I bother trying to find it? “Oh well, I’ll play along,” I thought to myself, and decided to explore a bit.

After some time jumping around on top of the letters - collecting the exclamation marks (for no good reason)- some coloured flashing blocks appeared. I then set off on a long, long walk to the right until I arrived at a wall. Up, up I climbed… and then the game crashed, but not before revealing a gaping hole in the floor. Ah… was that the exit? Had I won? I decided the best idea was to just assume I had and go and have dinner. Not quite the “hour of gameplay” the author had promised on his Itch page!

With no scoring, no puzzles, no baddies, and limited obstacles, this isn’t the most playable Speccy release I’ve played this year. I’m sure the author would argue that this is clearly an “experimental” game where playability isn’t really the point. The intention seems to have been to learn assembly language and collision detection, which rather makes a traditional review feel a bit redundant. Or perhaps the whole thing is a work of genius and it’s all gone completely over my head.

So what are we thinking? Ace?



Ground Control to Tiny Tim

Tiny Tim ZX is a release wrapped in Christmas paper that contains, bewilderingly, nothing festive at all. It is, in truth, a meticulous technical exercise disguised as a game—and a wonderfully odd one at that.

This is a masterful exploration of Z80 assembly for the ZX Spectrum 48K. The developer's notes reveal a rigorous project: rendering tile maps, sprite collision, keyboard reads, and a flicker-free 50Hz frame rate. As a coding showcase, it's laudable.

The "game" itself is a surreal digital desert. Random words and geometric shapes populate screens. Is it a cipher? A deep puzzle? The initial mystery is compelling. Sadly, the conclusion feels inevitable: it's a sandbox of developer experiments. The promise of a game—with its defined left/right/jump controls—teases but never truly materializes.

And yet, the sandbox calls. I found myself playing, testing its boundaries. Can I reach those letters? Collectibles emerge! A mirage of a game shimmers into view... only to vanish again after two pickups. What's here shows profound technical promise and a glimmer of playful intent.

My plea to the developer: you've built the perfect engine. Now, please, make the game.

The other Tiny Tim of course, was this Batman-villain-looking character, an oddball American singer / comedian / folk archivist best known for his 1968 falsetto cover of Tiptoe Through the Tulips.

He had a varied and lengthy career in entertainment, with 15 studio albums, a Guinness World Record for marathon singing, and many TV and movie appearances. He performed right up until 1996 when, unlike his Dickensian namesake, he *did* die, on stage, performing his biggest hit.

Liezere

Snauts

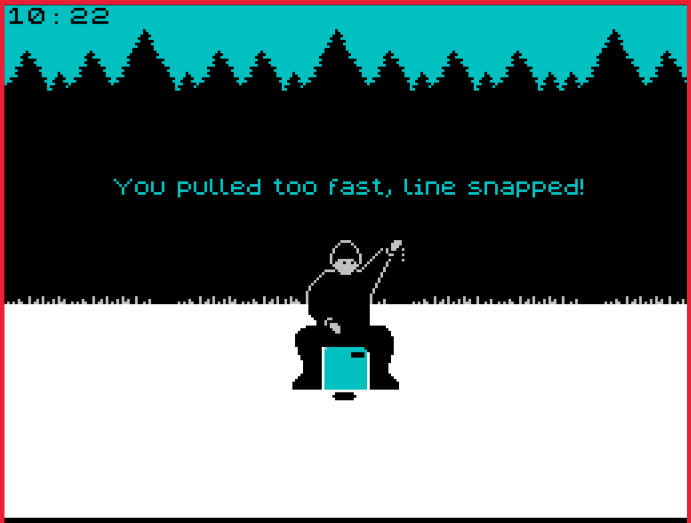
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45254

Free

If last week you had told me I was about to fall in love with a semi-autobiographical ice fishing simulator for the ZX Spectrum, you would have been both deeply prophetic and eerily correct.

Made up of a series of simple minigames, Liezere is a cosy fishing simulator that is much more than the sum of its parts. The author describes it as “an ice fishing simulator based on real events when my friends and I went ice fishing during our high school winter break sometime around the '90s.” It nails this vibe so well that it is almost a work of art.

Let me be clear about something: I have never been a Latvian teenager. I have never, in the 1990s or otherwise, crept out of a warm house before dawn, met friends in the crystalline dark, walked across a frozen lake with the snow crunching underfoot, drilled a hole through a metre of ice, and spent the day staring into it, waiting. I need to remind myself of this fact more than you might think. Because playing Liezere, I remember it. The game is so evocative, so perfectly pitched in its sensory details, that it has lodged itself in my mind as a false memory. That is not good game design. That is sorcery.



10:22

You pulled too fast, line snapped!

Don't worry, it can happen to anyone.

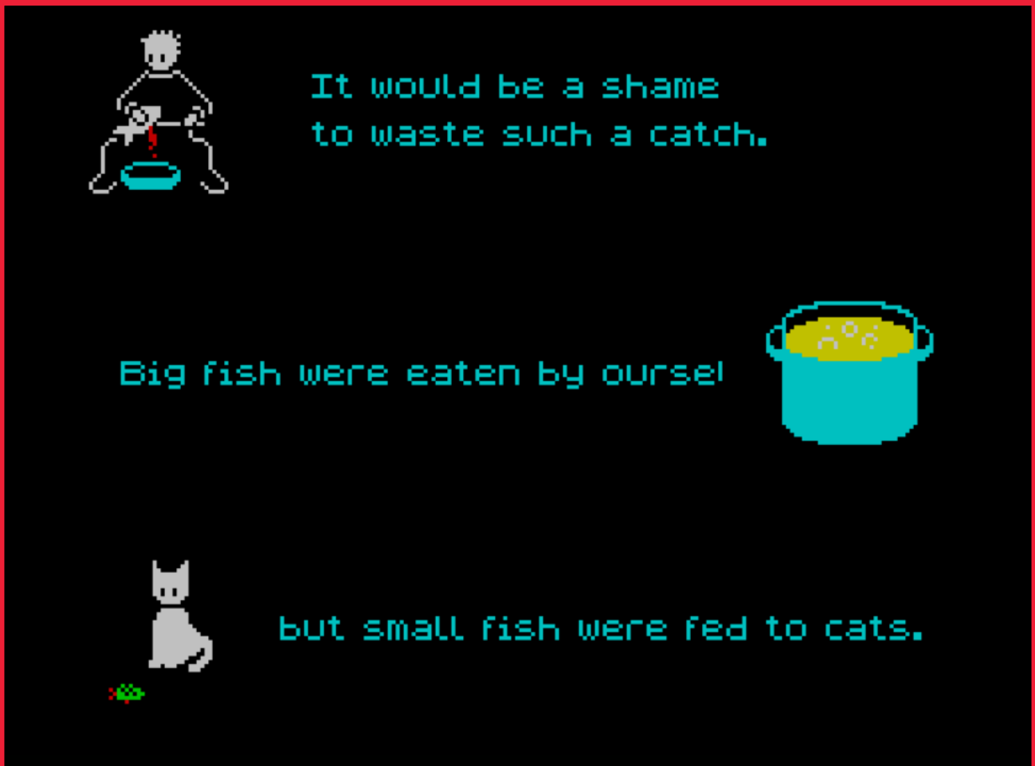
The first task is to pick an area on the lake to fish. Then you mash some buttons to drill a hole. Then you mash other buttons to get a bite, before finally mashing buttons—slowly this time—to reel in the fish. The game then tells you what you caught, and based on that information, the whole thing starts again. The fish you have just caught offers a clue as to where the next, bigger fish might be. The goal is to catch 'lunkers'—exceptionally big fish, often considered a trophy catch due to their size and weight.

You have limited time to find and catch your lunker. If you fail, you go home, give up fishing, and get blind drunk. If you succeed, you go home, eat the fish, give the scraps to your cat, and get blind drunk.

The game has a campaign; you have to deal with different challenges each day. These include hangovers, catching multiple lunkers, and other surprises.

The game's genius is threefold. First, the sumptuous presentation: gloriously smooth animations complement a charming art style and groovy music. Second, the change of pace when button mashing—luring the fish needs quick mashing, while reeling the fish in is slower. Add this to the time pressure of a waning day, and you have a game that is more addictive than expected. Third, the way the story unfolds feels deeply evocative. Feeding the cat, falling into a drunken stupor, drilling holes in the ice—these are not the usual aspects of a ZX Spectrum game, but it is these little touches that let you know you are playing something rather special.

I have never gone ice fishing. But this game makes me mourn that fact. It has instilled in me a deep, aching nostalgia for a past that is not mine, for winters I never knew, for friendships I never had. And that, I think, is quite an achievement for a little Spectrum game. Liezere is the lunker. Reel it in.



It would be a shame to waste such a catch.

Big fish were eaten by oursel

but small fish were fed to cats.

It's always a good day for the cat when I'm fishing.

Like Jamie, I've never been ice fishing, nor have I ever been to Latvia. I did once watch a football match where Northern Ireland beat Latvia 1-0, courtesy of a David Healy goal and afterwards swapped scarves with a Latvian fan. I'm sure I still have it somewhere. (The scarf, not the Latvian fan.)

That neckwear is my only tenuous connection to the Baltic State, that's despite the faux-stalgia spell this little gem of a game has woven on the Break Space office, making us all feel like we had a past life spending our free time getting drunk and landing lunkers on its frozen lakes.

The mechanics are beautifully simple: pick your spot on the ice; try to catch a fish via a button mashing minigame; then, based on the type you landed, strategically plot your next move in an attempt to reel in the big one. It can be so frustrating as you try to zero in on the right spot, but when you land that first big 'un, woah boy the unbridled joy!! Then it's on to the next day but even harder.

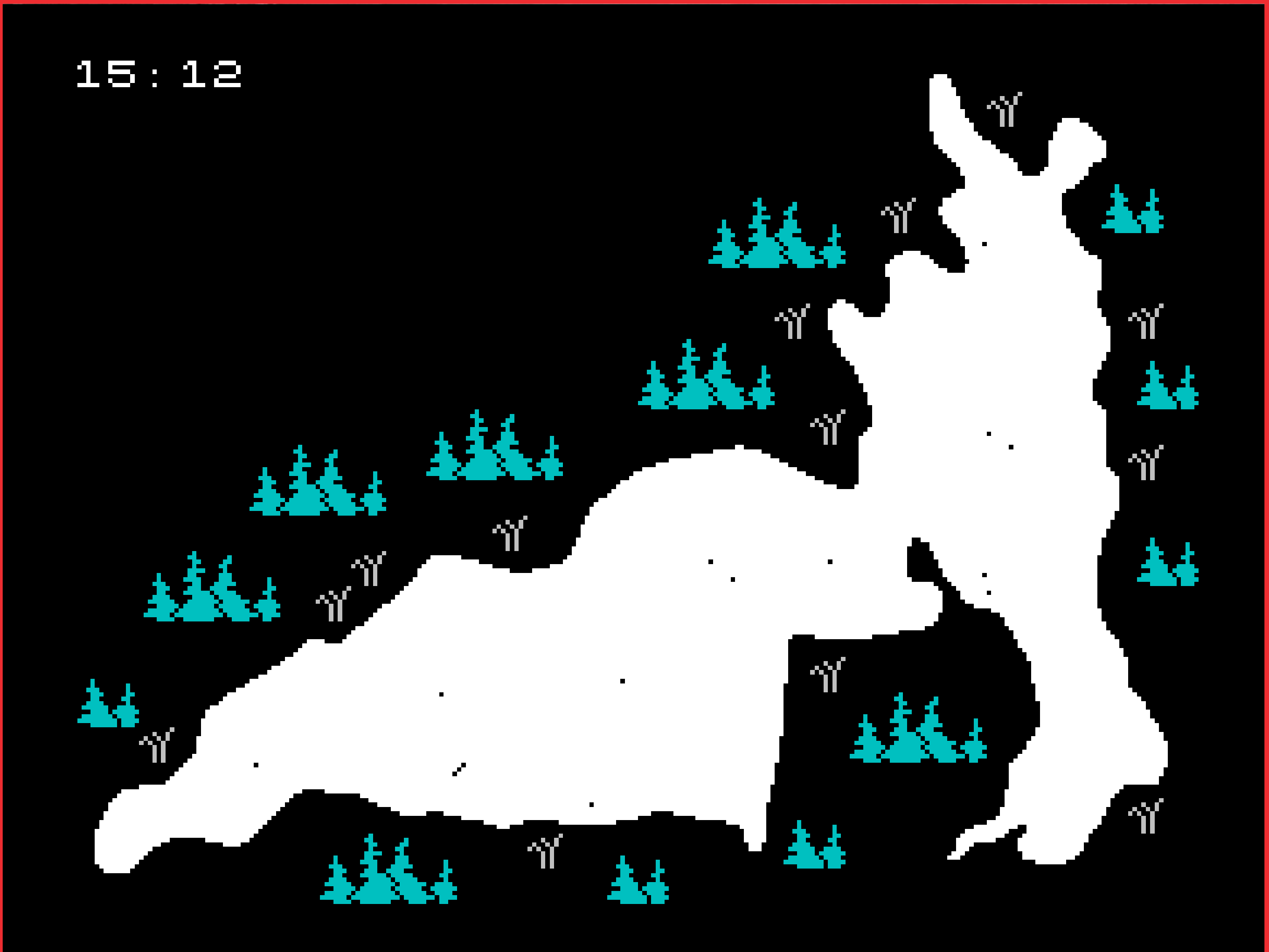
This arrived at just the right time for me, I'd not played many Speccy games in the last few weeks, real life had got in the way and I was struggling for time and motivation. Then Liezere came along with its simple charms and won me over. You can tell the game is one that has been made with love, it is full of humour, the quest to bag a lunker is engaging, and the music and graphics do a great job of setting the scene. I can safely say without fear of hyperbole that this is the greatest Latvian ice fishing simulator I have ever played on the ZX Spectrum.

Used to be, if you hung out on video game internet forums, every now and again some wiseguy would start a thread called 'Are Games Art?' and stand back to watch assorted nerds wrap themselves in knots trying to justify their Yes or No answers. Mostly, they did this by coming up with bespoke definitions of Art that would coincidentally cause them to be correct. Maybe they still do that on Reddit or somewhere, I don't know.

The reason I bring this up, obviously, is that Liezere is the kind of game that brings that question to mind. It feels clearly autobiographical, an account of youthful winter days, wasted in every sense. It's not especially entertaining from the gameplay point of view - you follow simple arrow prompts to learn the sequence on the first day, then have to remember the rhythm on the subsequent days. Homing in on the Lunker is satisfying, it has to be said, but just as commonly the takeaway is frustration. Which may well be the point.

It keeps you playing though, just to access the next slice of life as you move successfully between days. It looks good too, with nice clean lines and simple 2-frame animations describing well composed scenes. The music on 128k models is jaunty but maybe in opposition to the overall mood. Possibly 48k is the way to go here. Pleasingly, there are just 3 days to play through, so it doesn't drag out too much. It does what it sets out to do, and stops.

But is it Art? Well, of course, if you accept that Art is a way of conveying emotion and/or meaning to an audience via a...hold on...yes...I've just been told that I've died from acute irony poisoning. How inconvenient.



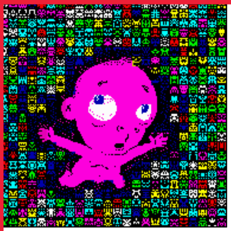
Ice fishing, or golf course construction?

Space Balls

Michael Wadlow

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45207

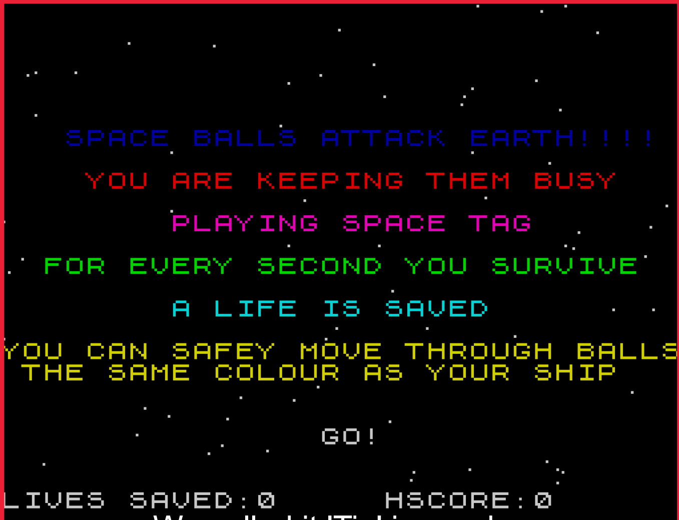
PWYW / $2



This is deliciously 1982, back when coders were busy making novel and not so novel riffs on arcade games in compiled BASIC or machine code. They'd have a bit of flicker, but all the extra speed and sprites that BASIC wouldn't allow made things very exciting. There'd be a vaguely defined plot involving aliens threatening Earth, and the title would be so descriptive that even Charles Dickens would think it's too on the nose. Michael Wadlow has given us all this - knowingly - in the form of Space Balls.

You need to avoid the balls, which move rapidly and diagonally, incrementing colour every time they change direction at the screen edge. Pressing 'fire' cycles your own colour, and makes you immune to anything that matches. So you could sum this up as a pacifist Asteroids with a twist. I could even go as far as to say the colour matching mechanic is redolent of Ikaruga. But that'd be stretching it, because things move far too quickly to be able to use it as a viable tactic.

Avoiding the balls is challenge enough though. There's something about diagonally moving baddies that does my head in. Their movement should be entirely predictable—and it is—but it totally bypasses my logic circuits. It's as thrilling and disorientating as standing in the middle of a Stock Car race wearing only a cravat, and I speak from experience on that.



```
  SPACE BALLS ATTACK EARTH!!!!
   YOU ARE KEEPING THEM BUSY
       PLAYING SPACE TAG
 FOR EVERY SECOND YOU SURVIVE
       A LIFE IS SAVED
YOU CAN SAFEY MOVE THROUGH BALLS
 THE SAME COLOUR AS YOUR SHIP

             GO!

LIVES SAVED:0       HSCORE:0
```

We called it 'Tig' in my day

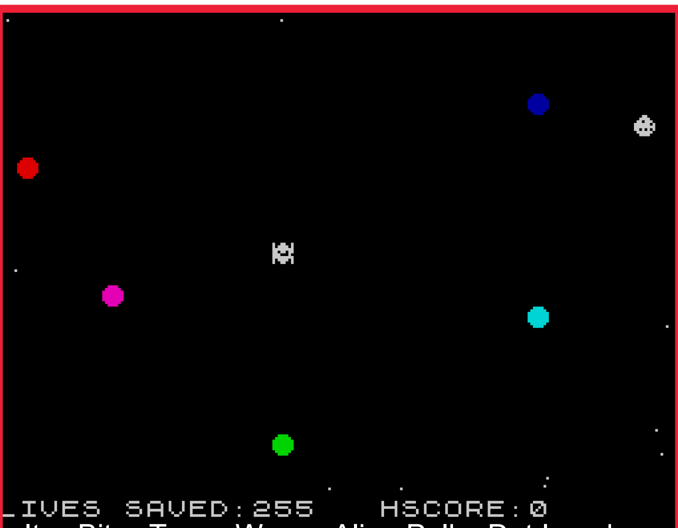
Now then—sound: when you die there's a 32 second Frere Gustav dirge which is straight from p135 of the Sinclair BASIC manual. Suffer it once for old time's sake, and then use POKE 44420,201 to disable it. On the current release version (v1.1) it's best to reload anyway, as there are some bugs on restarting.

Uncomplicated as it is, this game packs a punch. Back in the day, we'd buy it for £1.99, maybe, and play it to death. The Hi-score bug would go down in folklore and make it *more* popular if anything. Playground folklore would revere the kid that overclocked the score ten times. The fact that we still do this, only on the internet and without hooky cassettes, just goes to show that the author got a hell of a lot of things right with Space Balls.

No, this game isn't based on the classic Mel Brooks movie - which is a bit disappointing, as I'd have enjoyed playing as Barf, the half-man/half-dog who is his own best friend! Nope - this is an Asteroids-style arcade game where the aim is to survive against the coloured space balls for as long as you can, while racking up a juicy high score.

First off, the title screen explains the controls, but neglects to mention that pressing SPACE allows you to change colour. This is worth pointing out, as it's a core gameplay mechanic and makes you invincible against balls of the same colour!

There's no sound, so I'd recommend humming a space-themed tune to yourself as you play. I'd suggest perhaps the Star Wars theme, or "Calling Occupants of Interplanetary Craft" by The Carpenters. The gameplay is quite addictive, in that classic arcade-game way. After several games, I found that choosing a corner to hide in and staying perfectly still was a good tactic... which is coincidentally the same one I'd probably apply in real life if aliens ever did invade Earth.



```
LIVES SAVED:255    HSCORE:0
```

Itsy Bitsy Teeny Weeny Alien Polka Dot Invaders

The scoring bug is a bit of a shame - your score goes berserk once you pass 255. ZX Dave laid down the gauntlet with his score of 255 + 67 (323). I managed to creep past 255 using my cowardly, against-the-spirit-of-the-game tactics, after which my score rocketed up to 955 in a matter of seconds! I'll take that! Methinks I win this round, Dave!

Overall, it's a fun little game. If the scoring bug gets fixed, we'll really have a winner on our hands. And yes, the game-over music - a pleasant rendition of Frère Jacques - does go on just a trifle too long... "Time to contemplate" the author suggests!

There was some disagreement in the Towers about 'Tig' vs 'Tag'. Dave suggested that Jon was perhaps a snob, or American or something, while Dave in turn was accused of being terribly regional, perhaps even provincial.

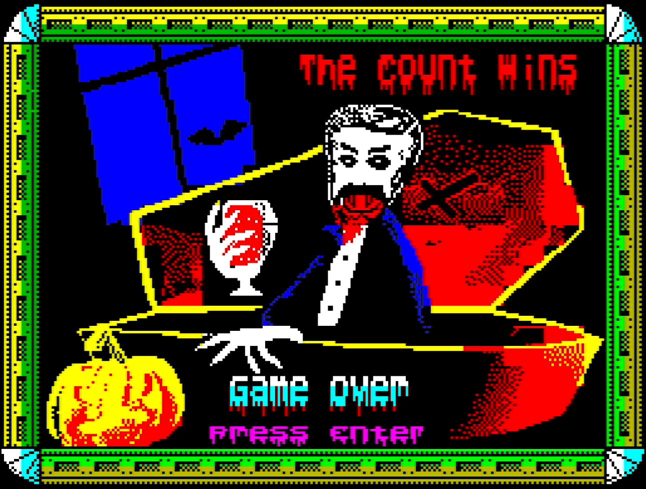
The Editor was forced to decree that the childrens' game was to be referred to as the very literal 'Chase', unless everyone wanted to try office favourite games like 'Fired', 'Clean out your desk' and 'Queue for the Dole'.

Max Stone 2 : Microhobby Edition

Valen Abreu

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44847

PWYW / £1



Those Capri-Sun packets are a nightmare.

There is only one sort of 2D platform game that I like more than a difficult 2D platform game, and that's an easy 2D platform game. Not that I don't like Max Stone's latest adventure, of course.

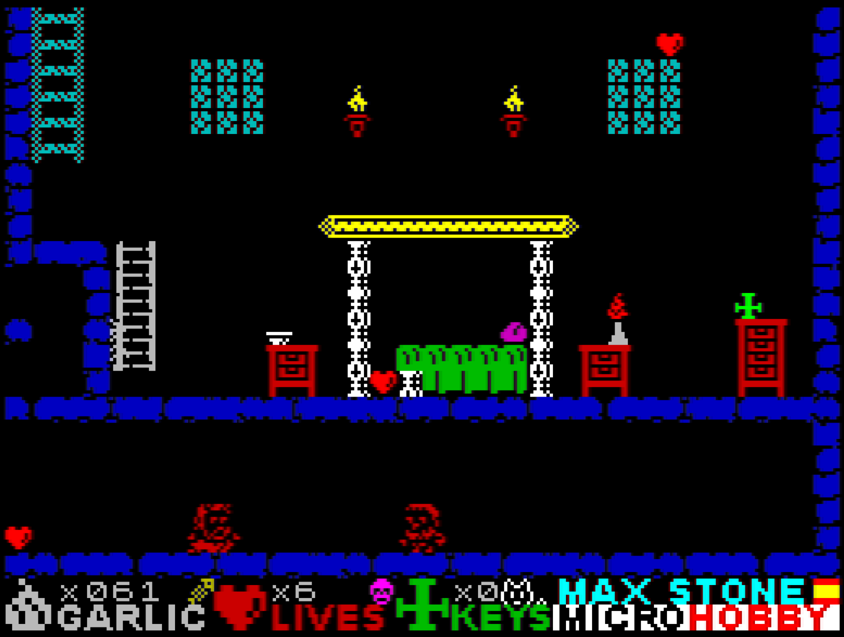
It's a bit of a tough one for sure. But what do you expect; the MicroHobby Castle is well protected by fierce henchmen, and is home to the formidable Count Sanz. Rumours about the fortress and its evil workings are enough to perk Max's interest, and after hearing of recycled toilet paper being used in the printing of magazines, he felt obliged to investigate further and hopefully bring down the Count's reign of terror!

Our protagonist here is super zippy, sprinting around the MicroHobby Castle and surrounding locale with real gusto, like a hyper active child after too many sugary snacks on Christmas day morning, so beware as leaving some screens lead to instant hazards that are difficult to avoid without sharp reflexes, or at least knowledge of where all of the dangers are.

It would appear in this platform adventure that certain items may only be collected in an unknown order - or at least unknown to the new player. The keen Cartographist will love this game, but getting to the next area presents its challenges. There is never enough to put you off giving things another go, though, which is the best indicator of a fun but difficult game.

The graphics are well defined and the avoidance of colour attribute clash is done well. The controls are sharp, and the title music starts off suitably moody, with some brighter - almost heroic - tunes in game, and a somber lament when it's game over.

Overall, the gameplay is the star of the show here: it feels pretty good. There are some design choices that I might not have made myself, but I'm not complaining about them either. My only actual complaint is that occasionally Max gets stuck in some parts of the scenery and it's a case of having to reload the game from scratch. This is only a slight blemish though in an otherwise good production.



I have those same Ikea cabinets.

The great thing about ZX GameMaker is that it's easier than ever to make a Spectrum game. When the engine was first released, I gave it a go and was able to make a platform game in a single night. I enjoyed making the game, and I enjoyed the game I made. It's very rewarding.

There is also a very active, bilingual, and friendly community in the Spanish Spectrum scene, and if you're interested, check out their Telegram channel. The software is evolving all the time, and I can see that the latest games contain features that were not available last year.

Max Stone Two is a fine example of what you can achieve with ZXGM —a solid and unusual flip-screen platformer with nice graphical details, great music, and idiosyncratic level design.

The game design sometimes left me thinking: Can I kill it? Will it kill me? Can I walk on it? Will I fall through it? Can I collect it now, or come back later?—all at the same time! Most of the time I had no idea where to go, and there seems to be a room at the bottom of the castle that I couldn't escape from. If you're a fan of quirky platform action, then this is well worth checking out.

Storied Spanish Speccy magazine MicroHobby went on hiatus in 1992, as was the fashion at the time, only to return from its slumber in 2025. Hurrah!

MICROHOBBY
REVISTA INDEPENDIENTE PARA USUARIOS SINCLAIR Y OTROS MICROS
NÚM. 218
MICROPANORAMA
ACTUALIDAD
SOFTWARE
HARDWARE

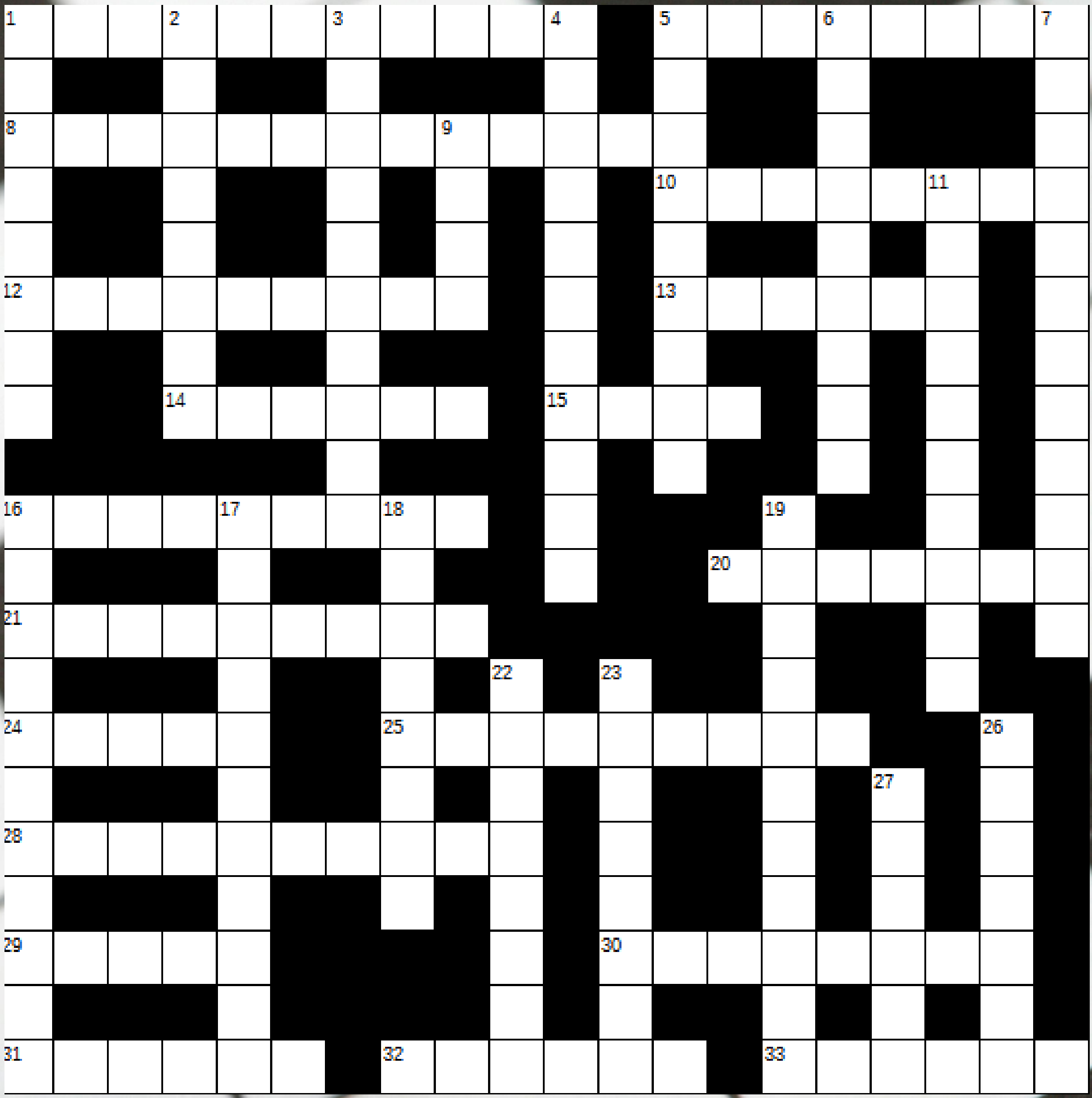
Issue Five Mind Thrive Brain Drive
(aka The Crossword)

The clocks have gone forward, the winter is finally at an end and what better way to kick out the wintry mental cobwebs than a cryptic puzzle from the beloved GreenCard?

And overleaf, the answers to the Issue 4 crossword.

Across:
1. Trouser hero? (6, 5)
5. Commodore/Atari hit that saw a fantastic sequel on the Speccy (8)
8. What Frank Bruno would say if you asked him what the most famous prison in the world was (8, 5)
10. Could either be Lost or in a Zone, or be infested with vampires (8)
12. Bomb The Bass soundtrack and subtitle for Xenon 2 (9)
13. Popular comic book reporter/detective went to the Moon on the Speccy (6)
14. There are probably around n-n-n-nineteen Speccy games set in this Asian city (6)
15. It wasn't just the Navy that had all the Moves (4)
16. Celestial absurdity (4, 5)
20. A spooky Club once featured on a Your Sinclair covertape (7)
21. Fantastic 2018 port of an Atari 2600 game (9)
24. Action hero had two official outings on the Speccy (5)
25. Helpful Andrew (5, 4)
28. Fabled haunted house that inspired countless games, films, books and songs throughout the 80s (10)
29. Ms. Mario (5)
30. Idealhorse (8)
31. Could either be Earth or World (6)
32. Sinclair User covertape game - Tharg's favourite, possibly (6)
33. Manipulable graphic (6)

Down:
1. US refuse collector (8)
2. Sad arrow? (4, 4)
3. Mosher (10)
4. Disruptor of soil (5, 6)
5. Doctor Who-inspired text adventure (3, 2, 4)
6. Rather nifty puzzle game from last year (9)
7. You've bought the ticket, you've waited at the platform, now play the game (3, 5, 4)
9. Arnie's was Red and published by Ocean (4)
11. Cowboy from Atlantis (10)
16. Amazing, wait a minute (5, 4, 2)
17. Time spent at a possible Skool leaver's job (7, 4)
18. Purgatory for felines (8)
19. Lion-O and co (11)
22. Classic Tago Electronics coin-op that had two Speccy ports in 2021 (8)
23. Legend of ______, classic PC and Amiga point-and-click that only made it as far as a Russian demo for the Speccy (8)
26. Obscure Automata fruit machine sim (7)
27. Either Sidney or Vera Cruz on the case (6)



Finally, some answers.

In case you didn't solve last issue's crossword, Here are the answers. Huzzah!

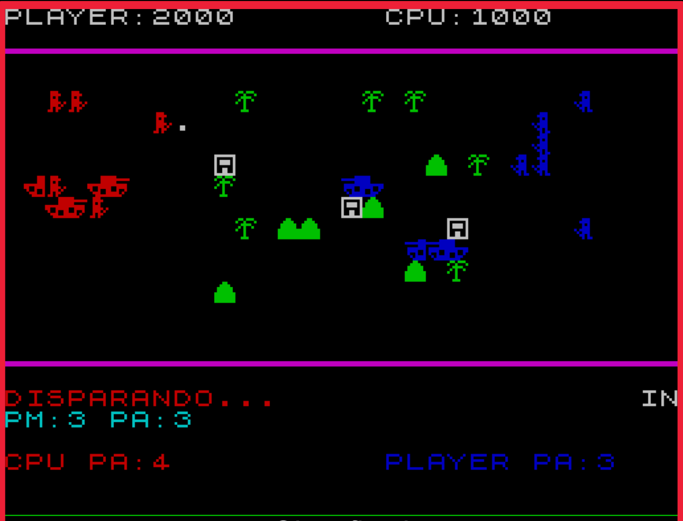
T	■	■	■	R	■	E	■	■	■	■	■	■	S	■	R	■	■	■	■
R	A	G	N	A	B	L	O	C	K	■	M	A	K	E	A	C	H	I	P
A	■	R	■	V	■	I	■	O	■	■	A	■	A	■	I	■	E	■	■
N	E	A	D	E	I	T	A	L	■	■	T	I	T	A	N	■	A	■	■
S	■	N	■	N	■	E	■	I	■	■	C	■	E	■	■	■	R	■	■
Y	■	D	■	■	■	■	■	N	E	T	H	E	R	E	A	R	T	H	■
L	E	P	R	E	K	O	N	■	■	O	■	■	O	■	R	■	L	■	■
V	■	R	■	■	I	■	I	■	■	U	■	■	C	O	M	B	A	T	■
A	L	I	E	N	L	A	N	D	E	R	■	■	K	■	A	■	N	■	■
N	■	X	■	■	L	■	J	■	■	■	■	S	■	■	G	■	D	■	■
I	■	M	A	G	I	C	A	D	V	E	N	T	U	R	E	S	■	■	■
A	■	A	■	■	N	■	M	■	■	■	■	A	■	■	D	■	■	■	A
N	I	N	J	A	G	A	I	D	E	N	■	R	O	A	D	W	A	R	S
C	■	A	■	■	M	■	S	■	C	■	■	C	■	■	O	■	R	■	T
A	N	G	L	I	A	■	S	O	C	C	E	R	M	A	N	A	G	E	R
S	■	E	■	■	C	■	I	■	L	■	■	A	■	■	M	■	U	■	O
T	■	R	■	■	H	O	O	P	E	R	■	S	■	M	A	C	S	E	N
L	■	■	■	■	I	■	N	■	S	■	■	H	■	■	N	■	■	■	U
E	L	E	V	E	N	■	■	■	I	■	■	E	■	■	■	■	■	■	T
■	■	■	■	■	E	L	E	V	A	T	O	R	A	C	T	I	O	N	■

La Batalla de las Matemáticas

gd49 Games

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45364

Free



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PLAYER:2000          CPU:1000
DISPARANDO...                   IN
PM:3 PA:3
CPU PA:4             PLAYER PA:3
```

Shot fired

Mathematics! Super important, they tell me, for figuring stuff out and knowing how to do things and so on. Science and that. And money stuff, like in the banks. Even poetry has to have a certain number of words and whatnot. Maths is everywhere. It's a terrible shame, really.

And think of the children! The poor kiddiewinks just want to be out playing stickball and lining bees to their hives and whittling things. But no, they have to sit in dusty classrooms learning about numbers. Best years of their lives, masticated to pulp by the joyless chore of mathematics. Luckily, GD49 Games are here with a solution.

What we have here is an educational title, which combines learning the dual core skills of simple arithmetic and combined arms tactics, both key in the exciting future ahead.

The game is turn based, with blue and red armies lining up across a single-screen map. Each turn, you get to make 5 move actions - three squares for tanks, one for infantry - and, if you have enough action points, shoot at your enemy.

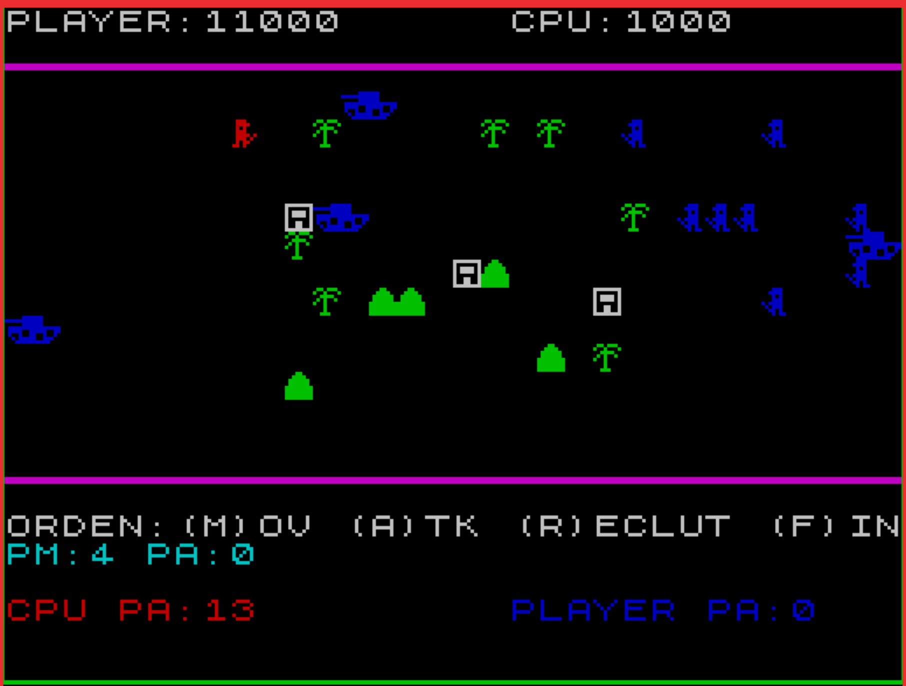
A shot costs 3 action points, and you get action points by answering a maths question. You get one per turn, which means that you only get to shoot every 3 rounds, which makes things rather slow-paced.

The maths questions are, if anything, too easy.

1 x 5 = ?
21 - 7 = ?
3 x 5 = ?

There's a kind of dichotomy between the simplicity of the questions and the tactical nouse..no wait. It's really simple tactically as well. The CPU barely shoots, and all you really have to do is hide behind the scenery and pop out every 3 turns when you've got enough Action Points to shoot. It's Peek-A-Boo, basically, and even babies are good at that.

Still - it's a nice change of tempo, and very nicely put together. The questions could be a bit trickier maybe, but then again I'm not an educator. Quite the opposite, in fact!



```
PLAYER:11000        CPU:1000
ORDEN:(M)OV  (A)TK  (R)ECLUT  (F)IN
PM:4 PA:0
CPU PA:13           PLAYER PA:0
```

Just surrender, Dude.

I used to adore maths at school. It was the only class where I got to sit next to Betsy Bucket (name changed to protect the innocent). She was the apple of my eye, and I asked her to the prom - but then her parents swifty moved her to an all-girls school, and my interest in maths faded quicker than the chalk equations on the blackboard. Anyway, on with the review (wiping a tear from my cheek).

There's definitely an interesting idea at the core of this game. It reminds me a bit of an educational version of Chaos. The maths questions couldn't be easier - if even I can get them correct before my morning coffee, then they are definitely too easy. I only had to ponder them for a couple of minutes each! That said, the computer player still manages to get them wrong. (Scoff!) Maybe I'm due a new laptop!

The game is so slow-paced it's almost backwards - and Mpk has already revealed the secret of how to win every time. Once you've figured that out, it takes the fun out of proceedings somewhat.

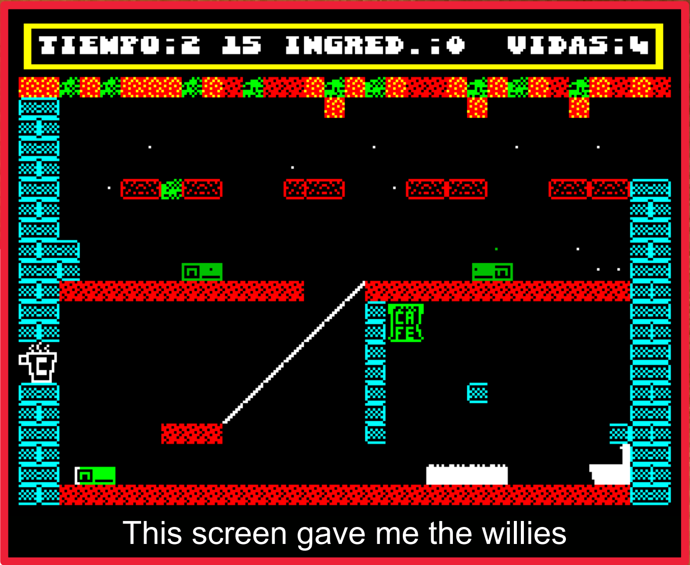
Credit where credit is due - It's very nicely programmed, with the cursor moving around the screen at a decent lick. It's also a good game for the nippers - teaching them a bit of maths and the horrors of war at the same time. Perhaps with a little refinement to the tactical aspects of the game, digitised 8-bit screams of horror when you kill the enemy (to really hammer home the message to the kiddiewinks) and harder questions for bigger rewards (what's the square root of 9998? Answer correctly and win a napalm strike!), it could be a winner!

Cafetonic

Claus Games

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45219

Free



This screen gave me the willies

I love the smell, taste and the buzz you get from a coffee, which is an issue, as coffee doesn't like me.

My dentist tells me not to drink it as it stains my teeth.

My doctor tells me not to drink it as it raises my blood pressure.

My stomach tells me not to drink it as it gets very upset when I do.

Mrs Sloanysoft isn't too keen on me drinking it either as I get giddy and keep the whole house awake at night with my resultant insomnia. (I don't think she's over keen on me calling her Mrs Sloanysoft either, to be fair.)

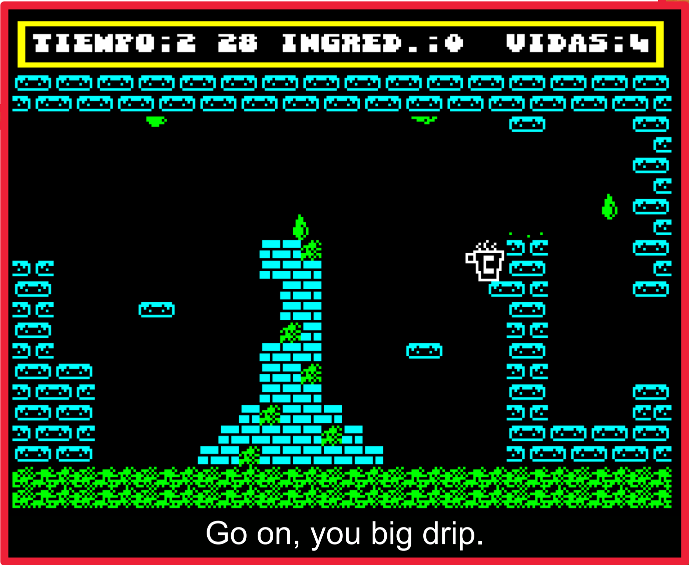
What was I saying? Oh yes coffee, as much as I love it, it is the bane of my life. Which is why I drink tea instead, lots of tea. Which brings us nearly to Cafetonic, a platformer where you play a little coffee cup, who is on a quest to gather ingredients (coffee, tonic water, and lemon) and return home in time, presumably to blend this unlikely union into something drinkable. (Personally I prefer gin with my tonic, but each to their own)

Although there are only three ingredients to collect in a small number of screens, the challenge is steep...I mean really steep. The baddies and hazards are plentiful and there is very little room to manoeuvre from the second screen onwards.

Do you like hearing the noise "virm virm virm" over and over and over again? Then boy have I got a game for you. So get used to that little death noise, you'll hear it repeatedly until you manage to find a path through each screen.

When you do find a way through, you get a nice buzz from defeating the screen, admittedly you can't rest on your laurels as the chances are the next screen is also a killer!

Ultimately it's an espresso shot of a game, short, intense and a jolt to the system. I'm not sure what it's done to my blood pressure, but at least it won't upset my dentist.



Go on, you big drip.

Unlike Sloany, I drink quite a lot of coffee - the stronger and blacker the better. So, er, I'm not quite sure what recipe involves tonic water and lemon, but hey - whatever floats your caffeine boat. Some lunatics like blonde roast, so who am I to criticise?

And to be frank, you're going to need the stimulant hit because this game is hard. Not 'oh, I've lost a couple of lives, bother' hard, but 'that's the fourth Speccy I've thrown at the wall this morning' hard. Even once I'd POKEd for infinite lives and time (because yes, the authors weren't content with the difficulty of the screens themselves, they've also given you only five lives AND a four minute time limit) I still couldn't manage to get the second ingredient. Alas, it's going to have to be a cup of instant for me.

All that said, I might just be a bit crap, and it is a fun little game to play - frustrating to the point where you know you could've made it past that last screen and maybe just one more go. The graphics are fairly simple but clean and colourful, there's a jolly 128K tune (which seems somewhat familiar, I'm sure I've heard it somewhere before) if you've got a grown-up Speccy, and MPAGD handles itself well as usual so the technicals are all fine and dandy.

So, if you're fancying something a little bit challenging then this might be right up your cafetiere. Just make sure you down a couple of double espressos first.

There was some consternation and confusion among the team as they struggled with the idea of making coffee with tonic water. As Editor, I couldn't really help as caffeine is for the weak-minded, but I did a little research, by which I mean I checked Wikipedia. And well, well, well.

It's the Norwegians. Espresso tonic was invented in Oslo in 2007. I'm blaming the long winter months.

To make one, simply pour an Espresso onto iced tonic water. The resulting drink gets a foamy head, like a sort of diseased Guinness.

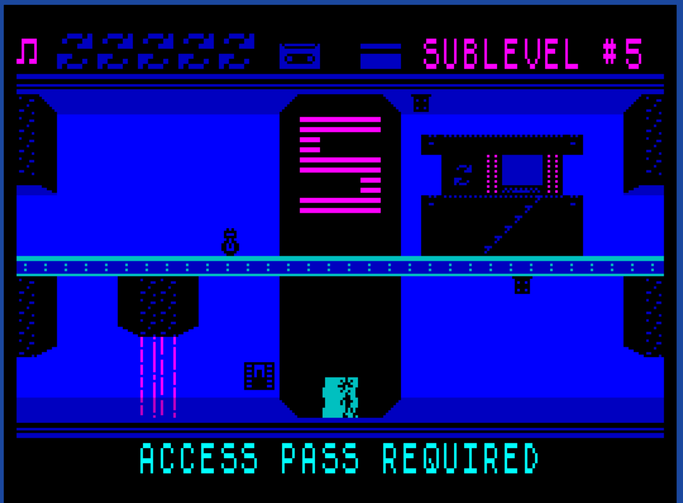
We recommend that you exclusively drink room temperature tap-water, like a grown up. - Mpk

Welcome 2 The Machine

Radical Reflux

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45234

PWYW / $3.99



Welcome my son, welcome to the machine.

Back in Break Space issue 3, I was rather taken by Radical Reflux's stylish Platformer "Magenta Sky", which really impressed me with its visuals and addictive gameplay. Like a lot of good sci-fi yarns however, it left us on a cliff hanger and I've been waiting with bated breath for the follow up.

When we last saw our hero Clark, he'd been captured and taken to a top-secret, heavily guarded underground facility by a u_corp agent. Trapped in this "Machine", Clark must begin his bold escape and discover more about "project u_nvrz". All of which is as good an excuse as any for a key-finding, baddie-avoiding, pixel-perfect, platforming romp.

The mechanics are quite similar to Magenta Sky, with the fire button being used to run & up being used for jumping. However, in the previous game the baddies just zapped your energy, this time they are more deadly.

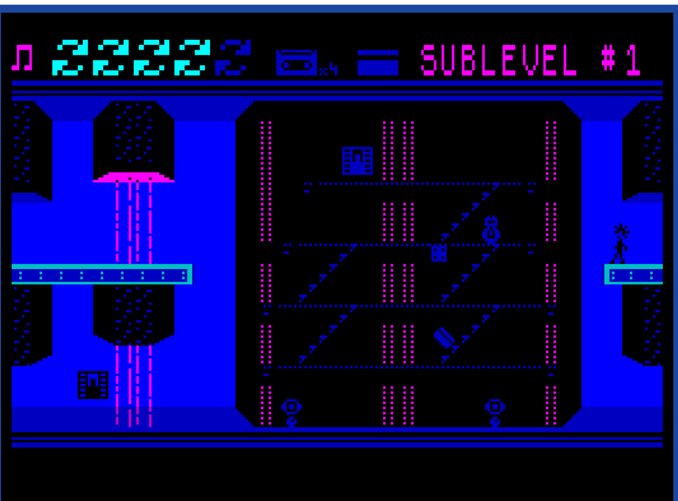
One thing that might happen if you dive straight into the game like I tend to do, is that you might find yourself moving repeatedly through 3 horizontally wrapping rooms, seemingly not able to make any progress. (Indeed I've seen a couple of YouTube vids were people did just that!) The Eureka moment comes when you realise that you have to wait by a lift for countdown timer, which grants access to the upper section of the level you are on.

Mind you, things don't get much easier from here on in.

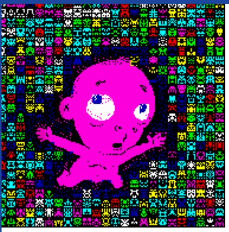
There are hazards EVERYWHERE from robot sentries that follow you, caterpillar like creatures that drop from the ceiling "Another World" style, and pipes with electronic charges pulsing through them. To compound this, you start off with one solitary life, you can collect a "retry" on each level, but it rarely seems enough as danger is everywhere.

Visually, the black on blue aesthetic puts me in mind of the legendary Saboteur. Sure it's not the easiest to see what your character is doing against the dark background at times, but it's so damn atmospheric it makes me wonder why more games don't have this approach. In 128k mode the sinister sounding backing track, which cleverly builds with each level, really adds to the atmosphere.

The overall result is yet another slick Speccy platforming adventure, with an engaging storyline. I do think it could benefit from having the difficulty toned down a bit (or at least featuring a more generous supply of lives) as it is LOADS of fun to play. I fear the difficulty may put off the more casual Spec-chum, which would be a real shame as they'd be missing out on a great game with a gripping storyline. No spoilers, but once again it ends with the promise of a further chapter. This is great news and something to look forward to. Hopefully they don't ramp the difficulty up any further!



Where have you been?



I think many of us saw ourselves as outsiders BITD, full of fire and with grand designs on beating the system. Fast forward to today, we wonder what happened as the reactionary dead eyes of a middle manager stare back at us in the bathroom mirror. We suppose life is what happened, but there's still a glowing ember of fight in there, as evidenced by the taut jaw and clenched fist pulverising the bar of expensive sandalwood soap. For some of us, this slight return may be because we've been playing Welcome 2 The Machine.

The game is all about atmosphere, with shadowy graphics redolent of Zombie Calavera, and tense AY music that succeeds in its aim of drawing the player in and putting them on edge. Being mostly two-tiered, it feels very open and sparse, but that won't stop you getting surprised by those bloody creepy sea urchin things at least once a level.

I'm with Sloany on the Saboteur comparison, and I'd add Impossible Mission to the mix, though the skillful physics and smooth animation gives W2TM even more pleasure in running and jumping.

Indeed the difficulty does make the 5 small levels a big undertaking. If you play it a couple of hours a day for a week, you'll probably be able to finish it without cheating. The rest of us can see it through with snapshots and not feel too bad about it. The main thing is, if you want to escape the Machine, don't be an automaton YouTube vid—read the instructions, be like the game, and dare to be different.

Baby-Man Vs Terminatots Part 2

PuttyCAD / 100TinSoldiers

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45338

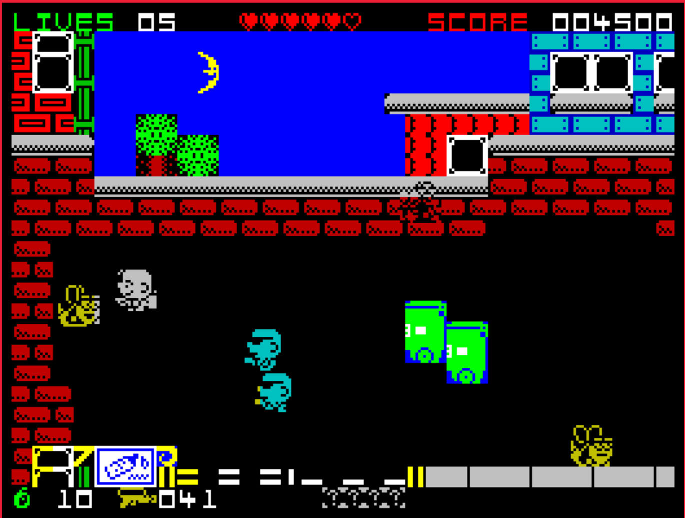
$1.99

There aren't many series that have managed to keep things fresh into the fourth installment, even classics like Renegade struggled badly in their difficult third act. Baby-Man Vs Terminatots Part 2 is the fourth game in the Baby-Man series, which has previously brought us a shooting alley, a Flappy Bird clone, and a puzzle platformer.

This time around, the (baby) formula is mixed up yet again by virtue of being an arena shooter. The aim of the game is to thwart the hordes of Terminatots that "you" (having previously played the role of the baddie) sent back in the 1st Baby-Man Vs Terminatots, which was actually the 3rd Baby-Man game. Got that? Good, now please explain it back to me as I'm well confused!

As anyone who tried to make sense of Terminator Genisys will know, sometimes it's best not to worry too much about the plot and focus on the action; and, much like its cinematic inspiration, Terminatots 2 has plenty of that! Things are fairly frantic from the get go, as swarms of the little blighters flood the screen and you have to terminate the lot of them before you can move on to choosing your path to the next screen.

As is the case with any game where you are being attacked on many fronts, a good control system is absolutely vital. Thankfully consideration has been given to this, with the ability to tap fire to shoot in the direction you are moving in, or strafe bullets in a fixed direction by holding down fire. It's a system that works pretty well once you get used to it, and compensates for not being able to have a 2nd joystick for directional fire like Robotron or Smash TV.



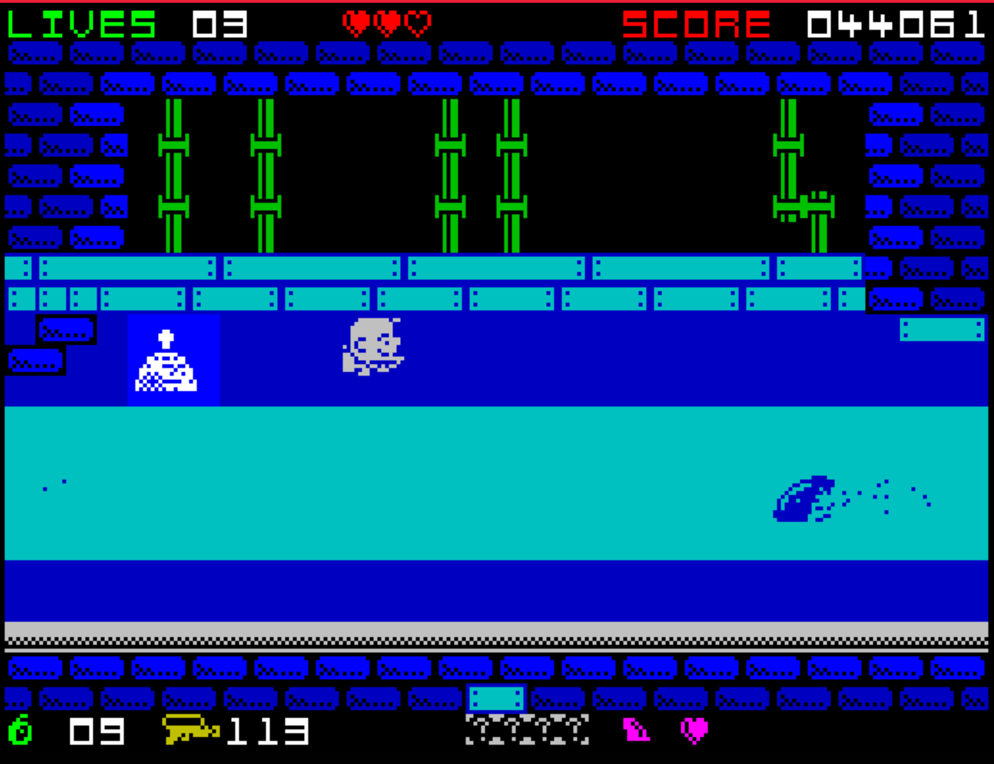
The Bots and the Bees

Along the way you will encounter a variety of enemies such as crazy bees, killer sharks, sentient bins and of course the Terminatots themselves. Each adorable Terminatots takes 3 hits to down, with colour coded states of disrepair. They start off in their full cyan form until you blast them and, after a short period of being stunned, they come back red and angry. Down them again and in true T-800 style, they come back in their final silver (well, white) endoskeleton form.

There's a good sense of satisfaction when you clear a screen, but you'll want to plan out your route very carefully because it's an absolute swine to backtrack through screens. Each time you go back on yourself the screen fills up with baddies and you've got to kill them all over again, which can be a touch frustrating, but it does sharpen your focus and encourage you to map the most efficient pathway to each part of the code and the final showdown.

If you've played previous Baby-Man instalments, you'll be familiar with the game's adorable graphics. Once again sound is purely 48k so we have a nice beeper intro tune & in-game sound effects only.

Overall this is a welcome addition to the franchise and if the guys are willing to make any more then *I'll be back*!



Baby-Man shark do-do do-do do-do

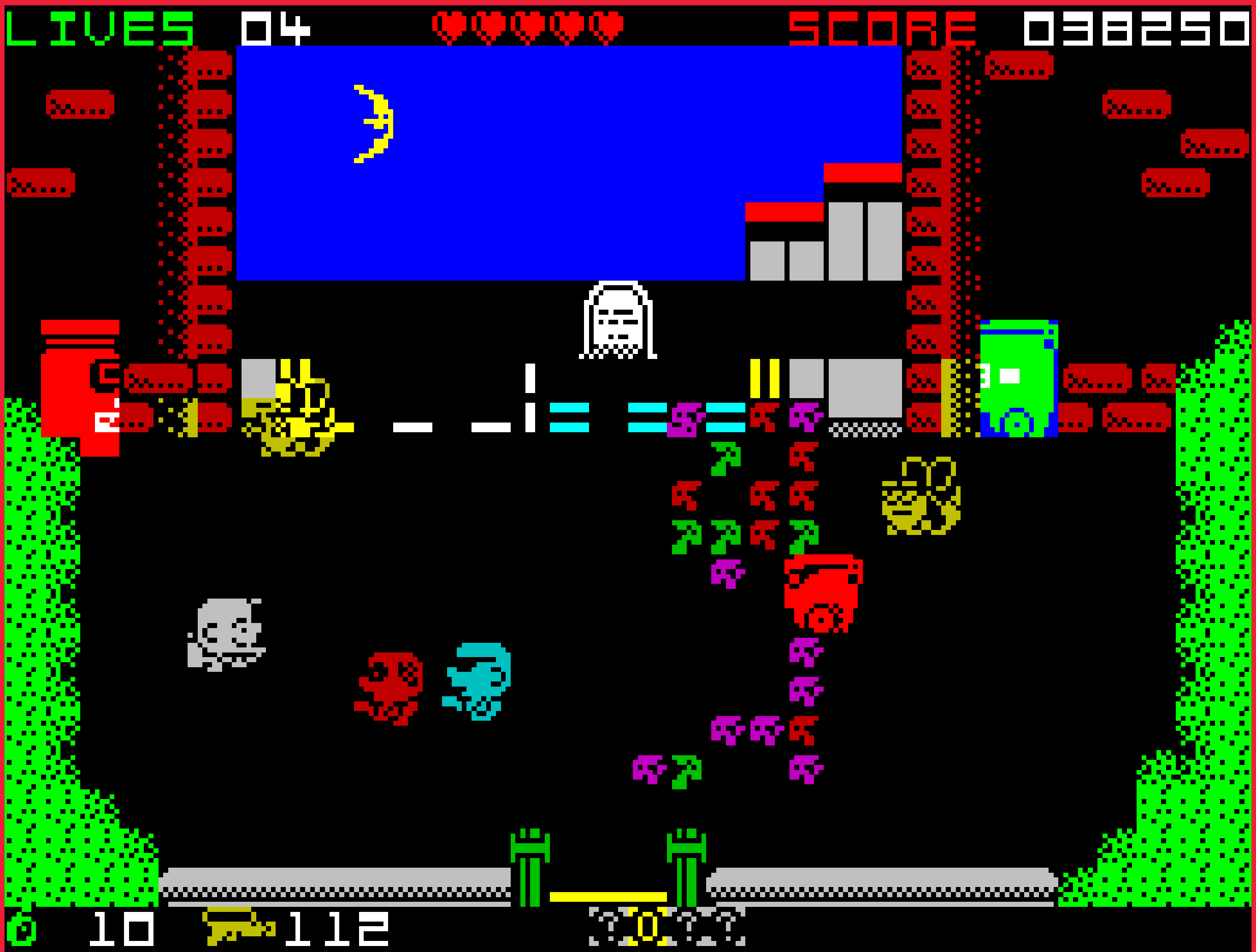
The BabyMan series is a popular one, and this fourth entry shines as much as its predecessors. Its slick presentation should not be ignored either, as the introduction ends with a sandbox practice screen that allows you to work out how the clever “Robotron 2084” styled firing system works. Unlike the famous Williams arcade game, though, your ammunition is limited; it’s not just the directional shooting that must be mastered, but you must aim and fire more tactically than other shooters. More on this later.

After the rather lavish introduction/training, you’re thrown into the mean streets of the BabyMan world; the malevolent Prof has sent back malicious Terminatots through time to defeat you, and whichever way you turn, hordes of these appear and must be dispatched with extreme prejudice. Collect the code to defeat the Prof and his minions by searching each location for parts of said cipher.

You have two weapons at your disposal: a repeat-fire gun which can be aimed directionally as noted above, and a limited number of grenades. This introduces a second fire button to think about, but you may complete each area by using your firearm only (usually) if you manage your ammunition stocks correctly. Fortunately both of your weapons may be replenished if you are able to collect the power ups in time.

The energy system seems generous too (read: I didn’t die straight away like usual), but that doesn’t mean the play is any less fraught with danger.

Overall, Baby-Man Vs Terminatots PT 2 is a very welcome addition to the series. It retains the charm of previous games for sure. With its frantic arena-style action, clever dual-weapon mechanics, and explorer elements, it offers more depth than some Speccy shooters. I’m hoping that the developers (PuttyCAD/100 Tin Soldiers) have even more Baby-Man adventures in the pipeline. I’m also hoping that Mpk is in a good mood, as this is my final review for this issue, and it’s late!



Taking out the trash

What You Gonna Do?

Jason Watkins

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45162

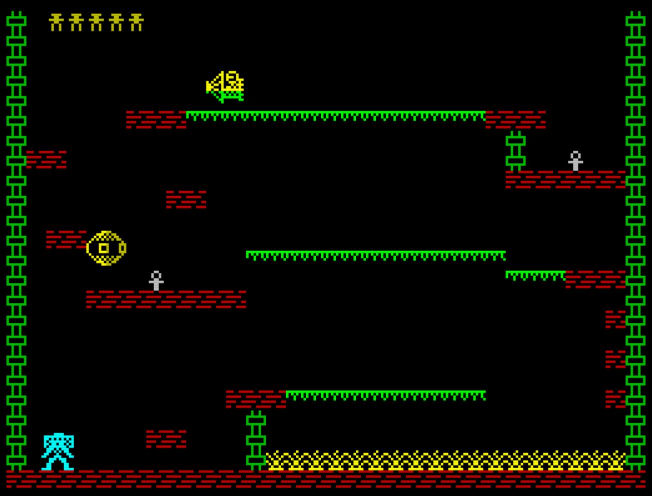
Free

Man, I didn't expect questions so quickly. What am I gonna do? Can I have a few more minutes before I decide, maybe have a drink first? No? Straight into it, then. Okay.

What You Gonna Do? is not actually an interrogation but rather a traditional jumpy platformer in the style of Manic Miner et al. You guide your little man (who could be a spaceman, or possibly just a chap with a very large rucksack) through seven levels of platforms, conveyors and collapsible floors in order to collect the flashing ankhs on each screen.

The usual array of monsters have been deployed to stop you in your tracks, and although you can't kill them they are generally easy enough to avoid using your jump, which has a little control in it, allowing you to change direction in mid-air.

Progress is nice and nippy, with your space backpacker moving at a fair old lick, so it doesn't feel quite as plodding as some of its brethren. There's also no time limit to worry about, and you finish a level as soon as you pick up the final ankh, which takes even more of the pressure off. In fact, it's not a difficult game at all - with somewhat generous collision detection compared to its peers (in a good way) and only seven levels to get through, it's likely you'll be able to see this one through to the end with a little practice.

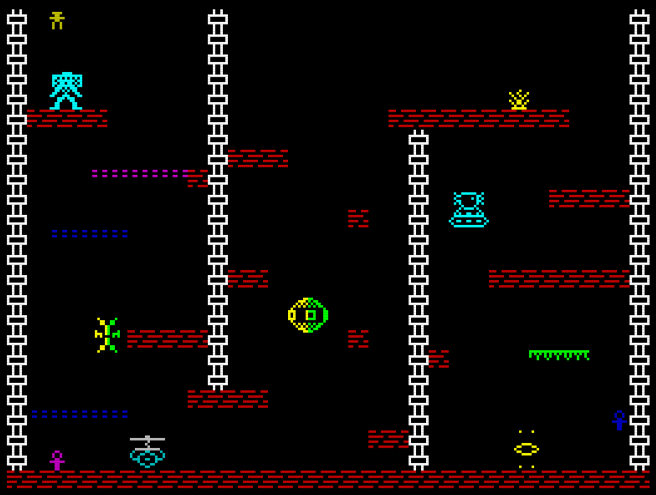


Backpacker's Guide to the Ankhiverse

Unlike most platformers these days, this one was hand-coded in assembly over a six month period, and Mr Watkins has done a very nice job indeed - the sprites are smooth and the engine handles itself handsomely without ever missing a beat. There's also a little beeper ditty to accompany you in your travels, but unfortunately it's very short and grates quite quickly; you can turn this off, but alas there are no sound effects so if you choose to do so, so the rest of the game will play out in complete silence.

And that's basically it - if you can imagine one of the better budget platformers circa-1984 then you've got a pretty good idea how this one goes.

So what am I gonna do? I'm gonna go and have another go, that's what. So there. Can I still get that drink, though?



So what'cha, what'cha, what'cha want?

What am I going to do? Well, I'm going to turn the music off, that's what. Much as I hate to be Mr Negative, this is one of those times when you think back to the then-revolutionary inclusion of in-game music in Manic Miner, and shake your fist angrily at the young Matthew Smith. He's got a lot to answer for!

But he's also got a lot of MM-inspired platformers to take credit for, so I guess it all balances out. You win this time, Smith!

Once WYGD is silenced, I have to say it's a tiny little treat. Nothing extraordinary, but slicker than the Exxon Valdez and significantly easier to clean up. Which is not to say that it's entirely trivial to complete. I quite like the movement and the jumping, the level puzzles are nothing ground-breaking but solid, and it's a very impressive ground-up build. Well played, Mr. Watkins!

'What You Gonna Do' was a much asked question back in the 1980s. If it wasn't Hulk Hogan asking what you're going to do, Brother, when the oily freak's 24-inch pythons run wild on you, then it was Inner Circle making inquiries of local bad boys regarding their legal defence plans.

But the pop world provides plenty of other clarifying clauses to append to What You Gonne Do, including :

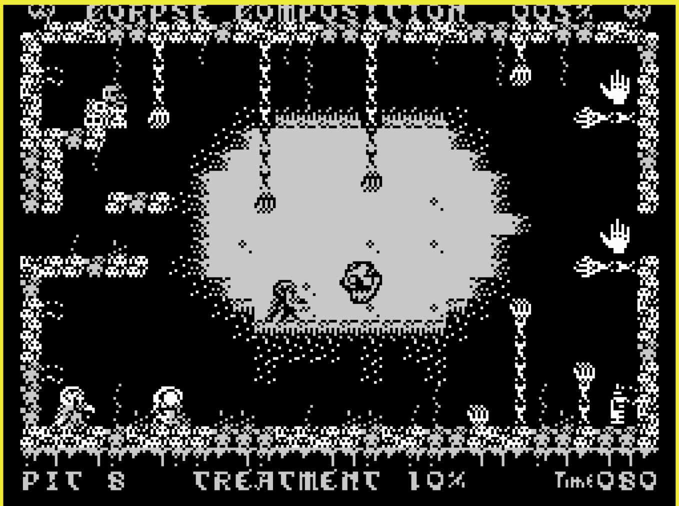
- with that dessert ?
- when she says goodbye ?
- about it ?
- when you can't take no more ?
- with my lovin' ?
- for me ?
- when I'm gone ?
- when the love runs out ?
- with that big fat butt ?

Doctor La Mort

Tokusoft

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45267

PWYW / €2



Take two Paracetemol?

Oddly enough, my GP is called Dr Death, and whenever I go to see him (about my rash) he also wears one of those ghoulish beaky plague masks. Still, at least the juniper and camphor smell nice, and he's better than Dr Cockrot. Neither of them can hold a candle to the protagonist of this game though, for this 'Doctor La Mort' has the unenviable task of entering the sewers beneath a Dark Ages Germany to stop the source of the Black Death.

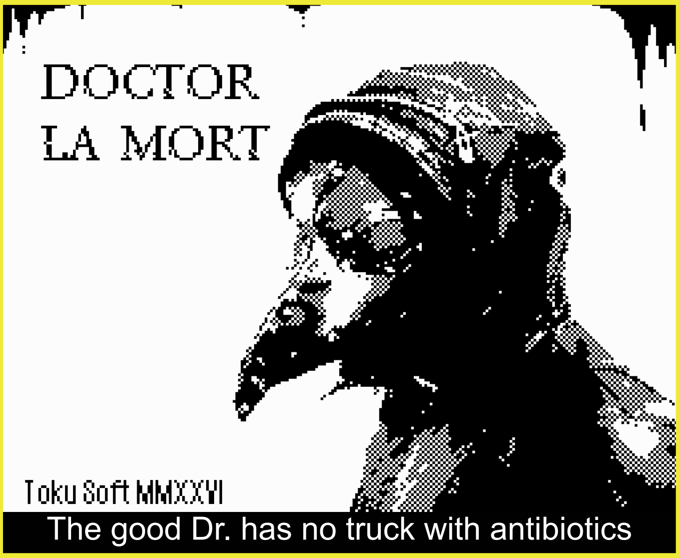
The 15 levels of this single screen platformer do a great job of portraying a macabre, disease-ridden environment. It's all black & white with the use of BRIGHT in places, the high contrast of which further enhances the atmosphere.

One each level, or 'pit', you need to eradicate the source of disease. Doing so involves extreme measures—not Benylin, not Lemsip, not Vicks, no—you find a pile of bones and drop it from a height onto an infected person. I suppose there's no room for compassion under the circumstances, and those faceless monochrome plague victims are really creepy anyway.

The AY sound is in constant battle with itself, trying to break up into freeform piano jabbing, yet still holding together enough to be called music. In the wrong hands it could all go a bit Les Dawson, but Alone Coder pulls it off, and the unsettling background it creates fits the game perfectly. So while it does run on a 48K, you'd be missing a significant part of the package.

There's plenty of regular platforming requiring good timing and match-fitness, but there's also some less straightforward screens that involve controlling two sprites at the same time. Other levels have invisible areas, either black on black or white on white, which I can see how it fits the shadowy sewers theme, but IMO it breaks one of the tenets of game development. Like reverse controls, it's a feature that should be deliberated over, and then a bit more, and then not implemented.

Author David Gracia, has fairly earned his nickname "Toku, L' Enfant Terrible" for his catalogue of games with hellish themes and sadistic difficulty. Doctor La Mort certainly falls into that category, but it's not so hard that I'd rather go back to the Dark Ages and take my chances with the real Black Death, which is not something I could say about Danterrifik.



The good Dr. has no truck with antibiotics

"Doctor! Doctor!", sang the Thompson Twins, "Can't you see I'm burning, burning?". They were talking figuratively, of course, and you could argue that wasting valuable NHS resources on "feeling a bit lovey-dovey" is really not on. Doctor La Mort, however, is literally burning. And getting impaled on spikes. And eaten by demon thingies. And ultimately catching the Black Death and dying horribly horribly. And that's just the first screen.

Let's get this out of the way up front: I am not very good at this game. In fact it took me an entire session to beat the first level, upon which (minor celebrations later) I found myself instantly murdered in the first five seconds of level 2. I then struggled to get back there again but made no further progress, eventually having to resort to YouTube videos to see how it was done, but finally (after a really long time) managed to make it as far as screen 4! Alas, I was to make it no further under my own steam, and it's only thanks to a handy hacked version (thanks, Dave!) that I've seen any of the later levels. Aaaaand those pretty much confirmed that there's no way I was beating this game on my own.

That said, it's really quite swish. The black and white graphical theme works really well, the controls are tight and when you fail it's always your own fault rather than the game, and each screen plays with the structure in an interesting way, throwing in new elements to stop you from getting bored (or complacent). A very special mention must go to the unsettlingly 'plinky plonky' 128K music, which plays throughout and sends a similar shiver down my spine as David Whittaker's classic theme for the ST/Amiga classic "Archipelagos" did (if literally anyone else on Earth remembers that).

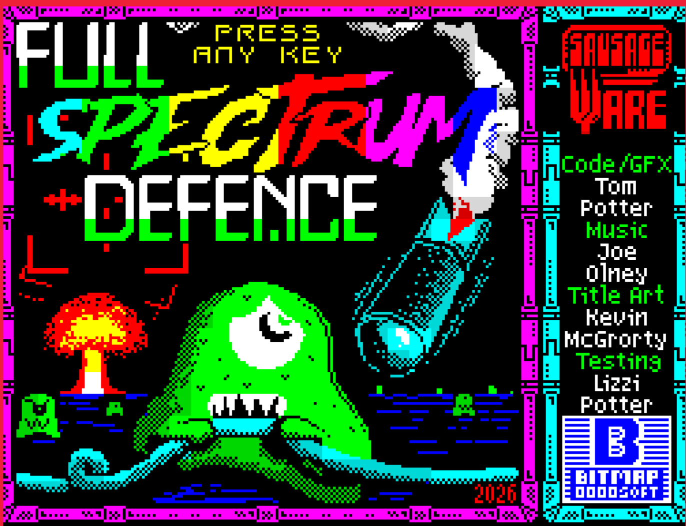
So, another one for the highly-skilled and/or masochists among you, and very much recommended if that's your bag. As for me, I'm going to take a couple of paracetamol and go back to bed to recover!

Full Spectrum Defence

Bitmapsoft

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45269

£1.99



No Snacking!

That ZX Spectrum sitting on your shelf – you dust it off for a nostalgic session on real hardware, only for disaster to strike. Perhaps it won't switch on at all, or maybe the screen fills with the dreaded jail bars. This isn't a simple case of a strong chuntey field or a faulty RAM chip. No, your real problem might be that you haven't been playing enough Full Spectrum Defence.

At last, we have a tower defence game themed around protecting the delicate internals of our beloved Speccy. It's a fantastic, novel concept for the 8-bit scene, though getting started can be a little daunting.

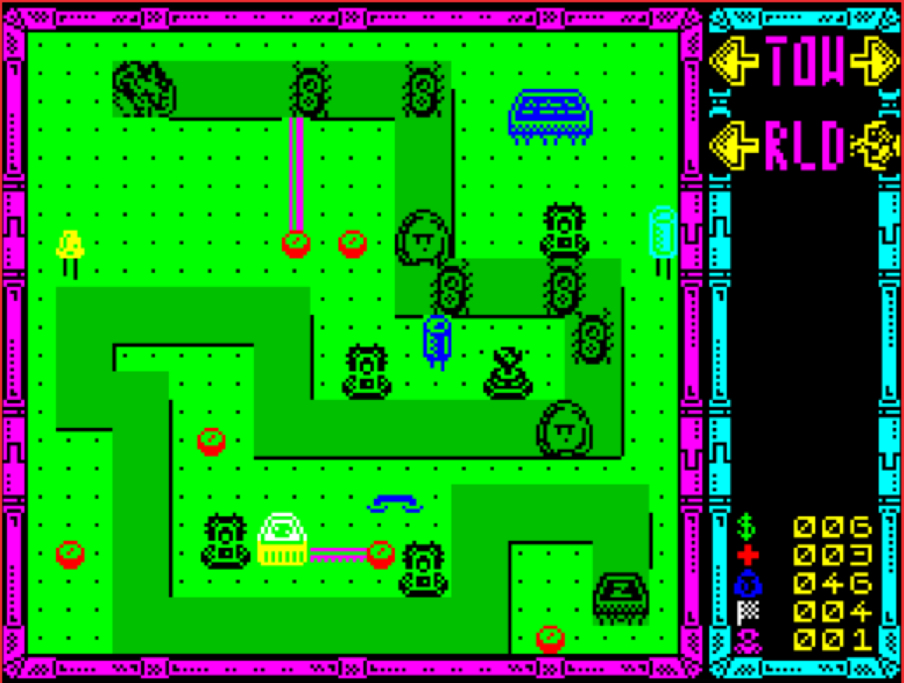
Let me break it down. The game is set on a stylised circuit board. A bright green path snakes across it, guiding the hardware-destroying nasties toward your vulnerable components. These enemies vary in speed and toughness. Surrounding the path is a darker green area – your playfield. Here, you must strategically place gun turrets. Each kill earns cash, which you spend on upgrades, resupplying ammo, or deploying new towers.

You begin with three defence types: the standard Gun, the area-of-effect Flamethrower (which is brilliantly satisfying), and the precision Zapper. Management is key, as you have a limited number of placements per level, and positioning is crucial for success. Progress unlocks more tower types, letting you tailor your strategy. All of this plays out to a fantastic, thumping AY soundtrack.

So, what's the verdict? Firstly, I found the game initially unintuitive; I needed the author's tutorial video for everything to click. The early levels also feel overly long. Once your defences are set, you can often just watch the parade of enemies for minutes with little to do. Shortening these levels would heighten the arcade feel, let you reach the cool upgrades faster, and encourage progression. While the music track is excellent, its brevity becomes noticeable during these lengthy stages. The pace can drag when you're out of cash, leaving you waiting. A fast-forward button would solve most of my gripes.

Conversely, there's so much to love. With four difficulty levels, the higher settings provide a proper strategic challenge. A superb little detail is that mousing over enemies reveals their health and stats. The graphics are fantastic, selling the fantasy of these nasties crawling through your hardware and getting blasted by your defences. I found it oddly addictive, driven by the desire to unlock the later power-ups.

Ultimately, Full Spectrum Defence is a valiant and largely successful effort to cram a full tower defence experience into the Spectrum's limited resolution and 48K memory. It's a unique, highly polished effort that's worth braving the chuntey field to explore.



Here come the gribblies

Did you know you could cook burgers in a toaster or watch a film on a Gameboy Advance? Well thanks to boffins who think outside the box (and toaster bags) you can!

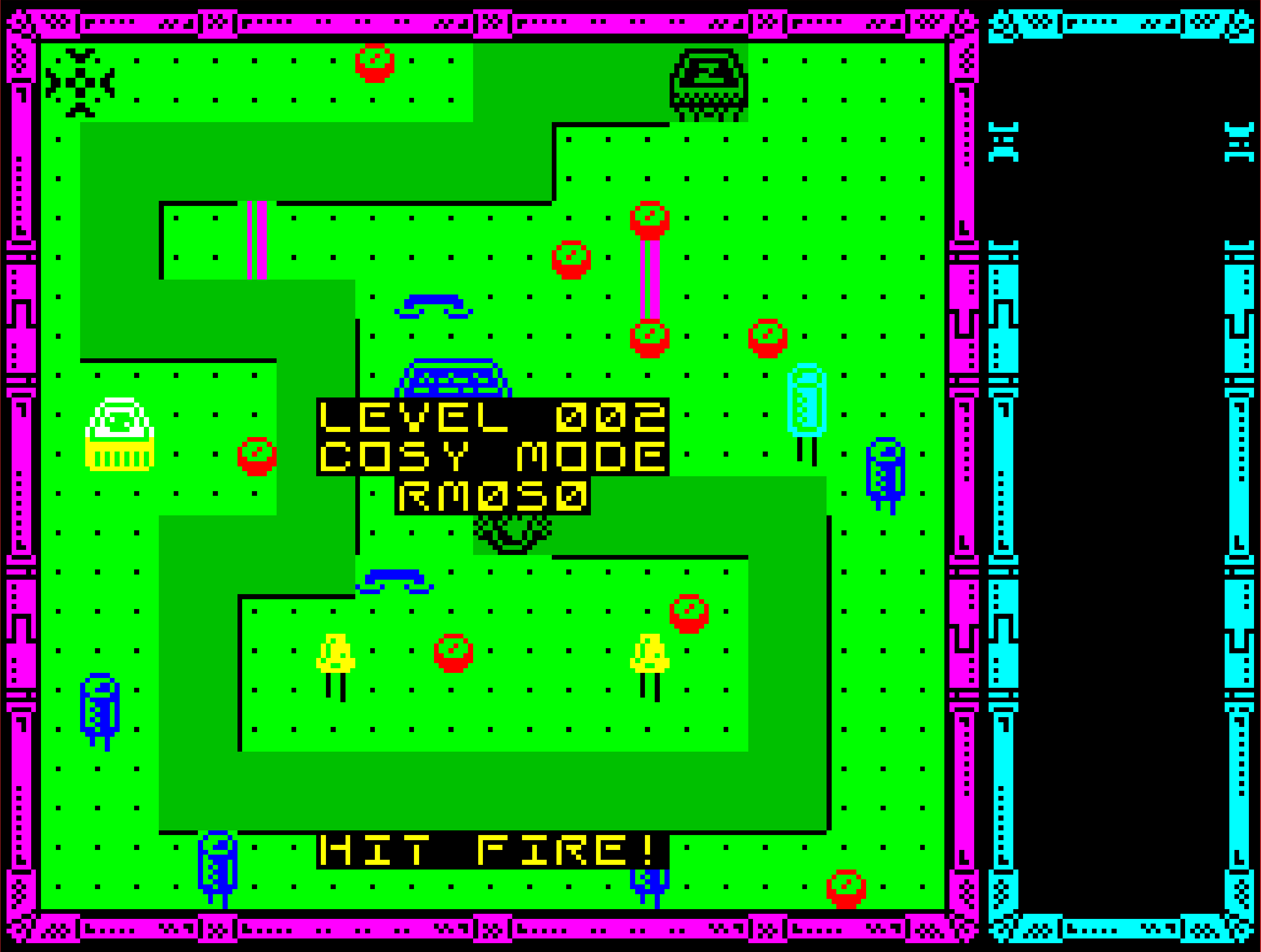
One such maverick is Tom Potter of Sausageware games. You may remember how he used MPAGD in creative ways to provide a new take on CITV favourite Knightmare and his unique push scrolling technique in SCION. Well he's back at it, and this time has used MPAGD to create a tower defense game, which I suspect is something even Jonathan Cauldwell himself would never have anticipated.

We start off on the right foot with a great intro screen by Break Space cover artist Kev McGrorty and a jolly tune by Joe Olney. The game itself however isn't something you can jump into intuitively, it takes quite a bit of getting your bearings. If you're unfamiliar with the genre, think of it as a bit of a reverse Lemmings, as you try to prevent the relentless march of the baddies from reaching your Z80 chip.

The instruction manual is your friend here and a vital part of understanding how to set up the towers and use your artillery to mow down the bug parade. Once you get the knack, things click into place and setting up your defences becomes less of a battle and you can focus in on the tactics themselves rather than grappling with the controls.

Once the defences are in place you can "call" the baddies & if emulating, speed up the emulator to shift things along. This works particularly well on the long earlier/easier levels where you're spending more time spectating than resource managing. The “quieter” moments do give you time to appreciate the nicely drawn and animated graphics before tackling the later, more frenetic levels.

I'm really impressed with the attempt to try something new here and everything feels really fresh. It is certainly a nice diversion from the usual Speccy fare and well worth checking out. Now if you'll excuse me, I'm off to source 100 writable GBA carts for the Lord of the Rings trilogy.



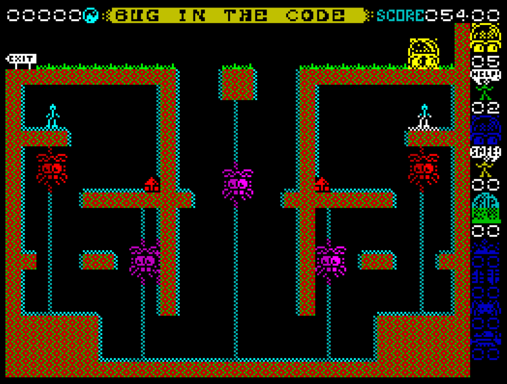
Of course, if you *don't* hit fire, it'll remain peaceful and safe. Food for thought.

Rescue Rocky

KTB Productions

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45382

Free



These things are going to bug me

Do you remember those things at school fêtes and whatnot where there was a length of wire, usually bent into weird shapes, that you had to guide a wand along? You know the one, if the wand touched the wire you got a horrendous BUZZZZT sound. In my mind you also got a terrifying electric shock, but I MUST be misremembering that part, right? Well anyway, imagine one of those things but way more fun and that's a bit like what playing Rescue Rocky is like.

Rescue Rocky is one of a brace of games published by KTB at the end of March and tasks you with piloting a rocket on a mission to rescue idiot humans. These bozos have got themselves into a right pickle, being stranded in some hard to reach locations and it's your job to get them to safety one by one.

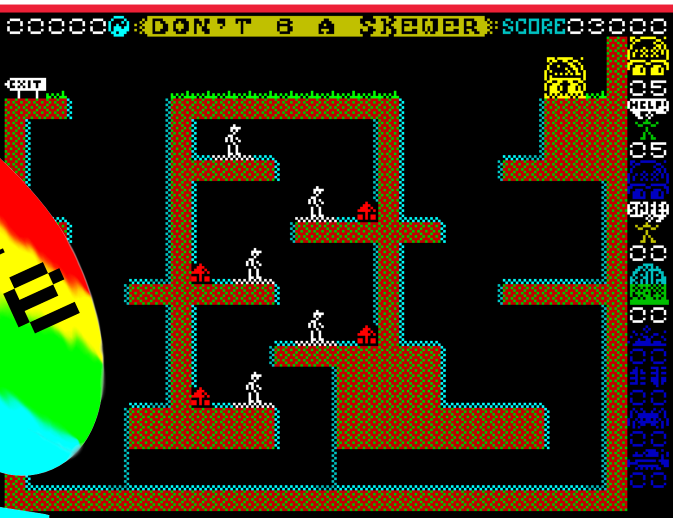
The game eases you in with some nice straightforward levels to let you get to grips with the mechanics, then ramps things up nicely with deadly drops, spiky ledges and nasty enemies. You can only carry one of these daft humans at a time and to make matters worse; when your rocket is horizontally level with them, these nincompoops get so excited they run towards you regardless of the peril in front of them. As such, you really need to give the level some serious thoughts before ploughing in with the rescue.

Thankfully there's no time limit and you don't have to rescue EVERY dunderheaded human; you can still get through a level so long as your ship doesn't come a cropper, but the game will comedically mock you for letting humans "unalive".

Rescue Rocky has really clever level design and is extremely playable. You'll just want to keep having one more go to try to get past the next level. The sound is functional, with sound effects only and no in-game tunes, but there are some neat screen transitions and the graphics are spot on. Given how few pixels high they are, the dumbass humans have stacks of personality.

So don't let this rocket fly under the radar, it's a game that deserves to be picked up, even if the foolish humans don't!

Break Space Ace



Look at all those idiots

I don't know what prompted author KTB to sit down with his cup of tea and think "I dunno, what if Thrust but Lemmings?" but I'm genuinely glad he decided to go off and implement it, because Rescue Rocky is tremendous fun!

Figuring out how to get through the levels with the maximum number of stoopid humans saved takes thought and a bit of forward planning, but it's never too taxing and as there's no real downside to eviscerating the odd bloke here and there (other than a drop in your overall score) it's a game you can learn, come back to and know you'll do better next time.

The sense of humour is also spot on - you are awarded a 'good' or 'evil' rating for each level based on the ratio of alive to 'unalive' humans you have, and the end of round scoreboard takes great pleasure in telling you how you did in a variety of comedy ways, complete with running totals of how many gormless anthropoids you've accidentally dismantled and precisely how they met their sticky ends.

The game looks and feels like a really good mid-80s Mastertronic title, and I have to say I'd have been absolutely delighted to have brought this one back as a 'random pick' from Menzies. It's charming, it's funny, it does a surprisingly good 'brown', but most of all it's an absolute blast to play - this is one I kept coming back to repeatedly, and I'm itching to have another go at right now.

So what are you waiting for? Go save some people! Or generate some Darwin Awards. Whatever floats your rocketship, man!

At first, I thought “here we go... a Gravatar-type game that requires a degree in Physics to understand the controls.” But that knee-jerk reaction was soon replaced with a gleeful mutter of “well, this is blummin’ playable!” as I smashed through the introductory level and powered on to complete the second stage without too much embarrassment. Before long, though, I found myself in deeper waters. The learning is exponential. So maybe scraping a pass in GCSE-level Mathematics will suffice? Or, more realistically for most of us, it’s enough to simply have years of 8-bit 2D gaming under our belts. (In my case, that belt is actually struggling with an ever-expanding waistline).

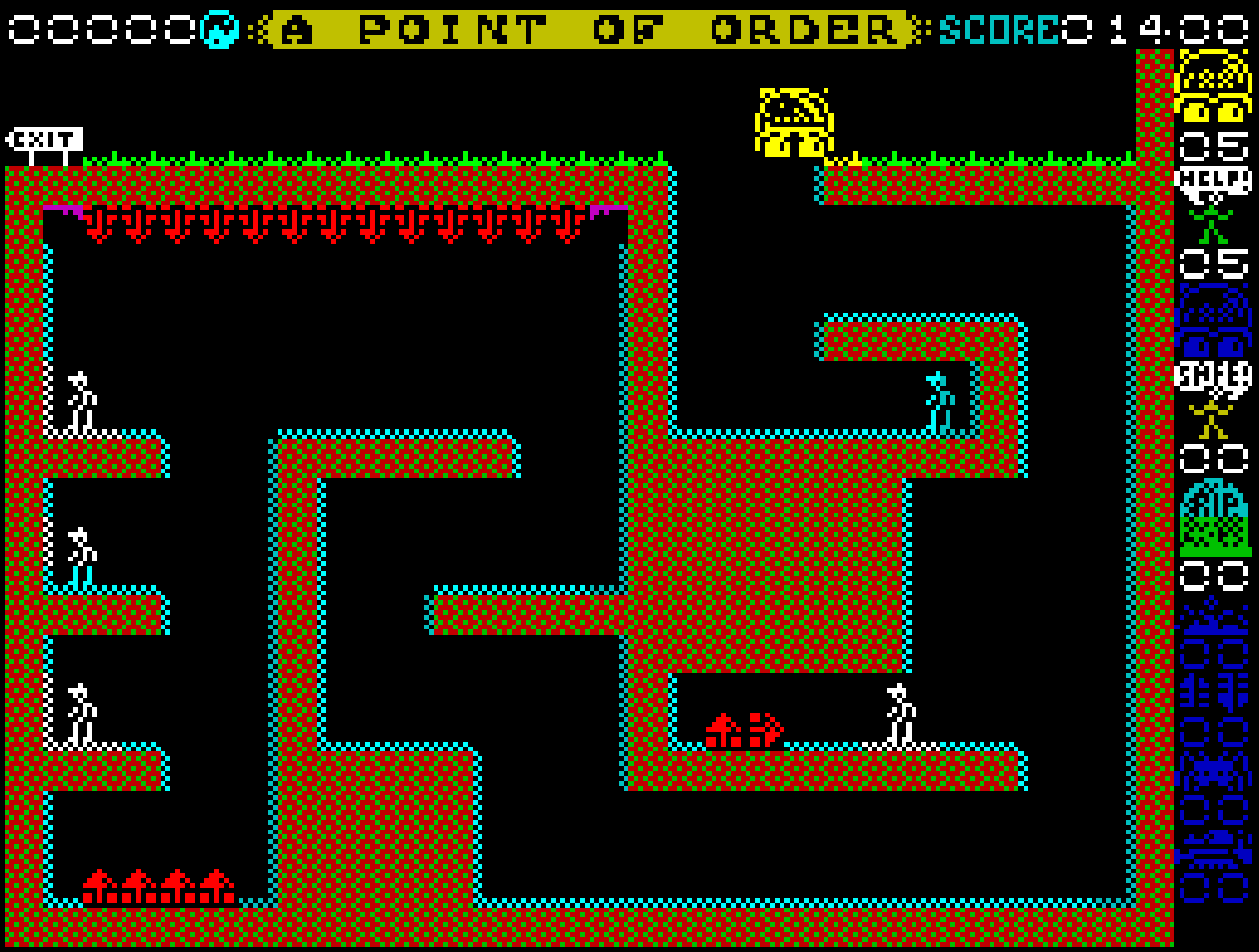
At any rate, Rescue Rocky is really fun right from the start. Smashing!

The core task is pleasingly straightforward: it reminded me of Muse Software’s 1984 classic Space Taxi. The difference here is that instead of politely ferrying chatty punters between platforms on demand, you’re playing the role of an heroic rescuer, piloting your trusty rocket ship through a series of increasingly treacherous caverns to save stranded and somewhat dim humanoids. These poor souls have managed to get themselves into all sorts of daft predicaments, surrounded by hazards and pitfalls that would make even the most seasoned explorer think twice.

What really elevates the game, though, is the clever puzzle element. It’s not just the narrow corridors and thoughtfully designed single-screen levels that keep you on your toes. The real star of the show is the rescuees’ behaviour: the moment you line up on the same horizontal plane as one of these bumbling bipeds, they immediately start lumbering straight towards your ship - completely oblivious to spikes, pitfalls and other dangers lying in their path. This single mechanic turns every rescue attempt into a frantic and thoughtful dance of positioning, anticipation, and sharp reactions. You’ll need to master the nifty, responsive controls not just to fly your ship safely, but to gently herd these suicidal wanderers to safety - or at least keep them alive long enough to reach your space craft safely. It’s tense, it’s clever, and it’s enormous fun.

Rescue Rocky is one of those rare little gems that genuinely gets better and more addictive the more you play it. The mechanics are simple enough to grasp in minutes, yet deep and tricky enough to keep hooking you back in for “just one more rescue.”

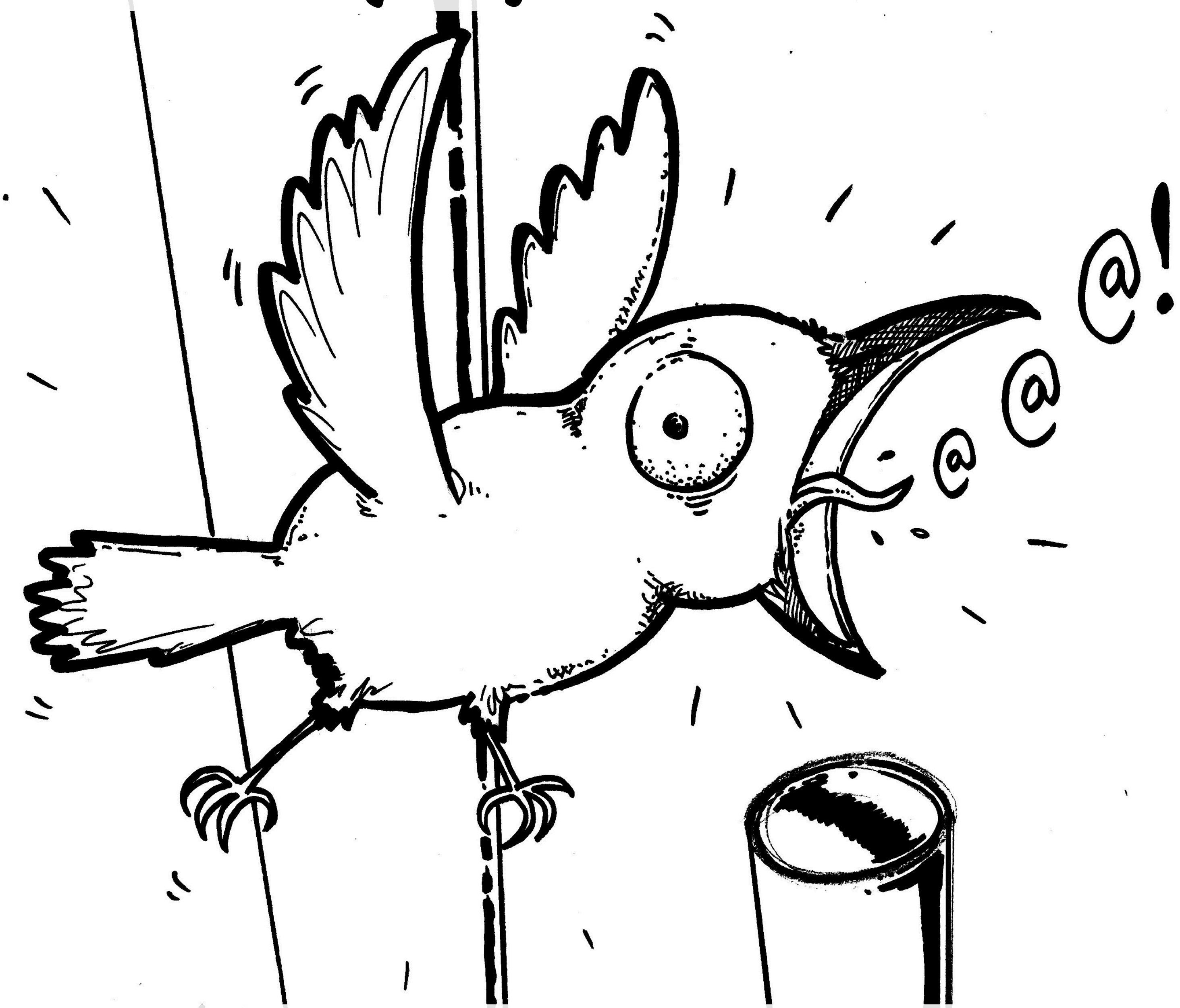
Go on then... just another go before Mpk notices that I’m behind on my deadlines. *(You know I read these, right? - Ed)*



Things are about to get Rocky

Flapper

A BASIC type-in
written by ZXMoe,
exclusively for
Break Space



High above the world, a small bird named Clive hatches on the branch of a towering tree. He was born with the instinct to fly... but not the skill.

Without hesitation, he leaps.

Now falling through a strange and unforgiving world, Clive must learn to flap before gravity wins.

Massive green pipes rise into the sky like barriers from another realm, forming narrow paths that demand perfect timing and courage.

Flap. Dodge. Rise.

Every second matters. Every mistake brings him closer to the ground.

Can you master the rhythm of the air, weave through the towering pipes, and help Clive reach the sky he was meant for?

Or will his first flight be his last?

```
10 GO TO 220: REM Main loop

20 IF ATTR (y,10)<>104  THEN GO TO 120

30 IF PEEK 23560  THEN POKE 23560,0: BEEP
.005,10: LET d=-1.5:

40 LET e=y: LET d=d+.35:

50 IF d>2  THEN LET d=2

60 LET y=y+d: PRINT PAPER 8;AT e,10;" ";AT
y,10;"@";

70 LET a$=b$: IF b  THEN : LET b=b-1: PRINT
BRIGHT b>0; PAPER 4;AT 0,0;c$; BRIGHT 1;
PAPER 5;AT c,0;c$( TO 10);: GO TO 20

80 LET a=a-1: PRINT AT 0,0;c$;: IF NOT a
THEN : LET a=8: LET b=5: LET c=INT
(RND*14)+2: LET f=f+1: BEEP .005,50: PRINT
#1;AT 1,7;f;:

90 GO TO 20

100 REM Draw game screen.

110 INK 0: PAPER 5: BORDER 0: BRIGHT 1: CLS
: FOR y=0  TO 21: PRINT AT y,0;"■";AT
y,31;"■";: NEXT y: FOR y=1  TO 30: PRINT
BRIGHT 0; PAPER 2; INK 0;AT 20,y;"#";AT
21,Y;"#";: NEXT y: PRINT #1;AT 1,0;"SCORE:
0";: PRINT #1;AT 1,32-4-LEN STR$ g;"HI:
";g;: RETURN

120 REM End game

130 FOR x=1  TO 10: BEEP .01,-10: NEXT x:
PAPER 2: INK 0: BRIGHT 0: PRINT AT 8,0;,,,
,;: IF f>g  THEN LET g=f: PRINT TAB 7;"It's
A NEW RECORD!";: GO TO 150

140 PRINT TAB 12;"YOU DIED";

150 PRINT ,,,TAB 9;"PRESS ANY KEY",,,,,:
PAUSE 1: PAUSE 0: GO TO 180

160 REM Start game

170 GO SUB 100: RANDOMIZE : RESTORE 160:
DATA -1,1,0,10,y,-.5: READ f,a,b,y,e,d:
POKE 23560,0: GO TO 20

180 REM Main menu

190 BORDER 0: PAPER 0: INK 7: CLS

200 PRINT ""; INK 7;AT 0,12;"HI-SCORE"; INK
2; BRIGHT 1;AT 1,15-0.5*LEN CHR$ g;g; INK
6;AT 5,5;"*** BASIC  FLAPPER ***"; INK 2;
INK 5;AT 10,10;"- GAMEPLAY -"; BRIGHT 0;AT
12,6;"press any key to flap";AT 14,7;"flap
to stay alive";AT 19,5; FLASH 1;"PRESS ANY
KEY TO START";#1;AT 0,13;"V. 1.0";AT
1,9;"\* ZXMOE (2026)"

210 PAUSE 1: PAUSE 0: GO TO 160

220 REM setup
```

```
230 GO SUB 240: GO SUB 260: GO TO 180

240 REM Initialize variables.

250 RESTORE 240: DATA
0,0,0,0,0,0,0,10,0,"": READ
y,a,b,c,d,e,f,g,x,c$: FOR y=1  TO 21: LET
c$=c$+"■"+CHR$ 13: NEXT y: RETURN

260 REM Set-up defadd

270 DEF FN f(a$,b$)=PEEK 23563+256*PEEK
23564

280 LET y=FN f("",""): DATA
97,36,14,0,0,88,128,2,44,98,36,14,0,1,88,12
8,2,41

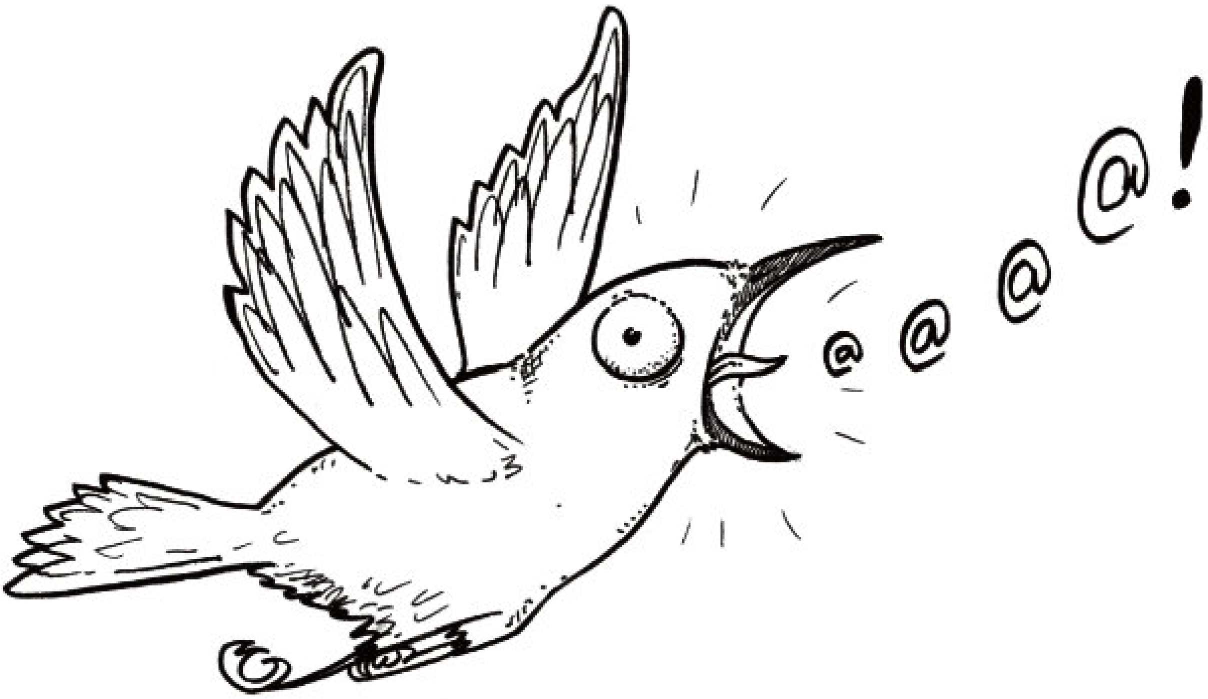
290 FOR x=0  TO 17: READ aux: POKE y+x,aux:
NEXT x: RANDOMIZE y: POKE 23563,PEEK 23670:
POKE 23564,PEEK 23671: RETURN

300 REM FLAPBAS by ZXMOE (2026)
```

NOTE : On Lines 110 and 250, you are going to need to access a block character like this : ■

To do so on the Spectrum keyboard, access the Graphics cursor mode by holding CAPS Shift and 9. Then, with the G cursor active, SHIFT + 8 will get you the required character.

Toggle Graphics mode off with Shift + 9 again before you continue typing.



The main loop of the game, starting at line 20, is placed as close as possible to the beginning of the program to ensure maximum execution speed. The rest of the code (set-up routines, the main menu, and auxiliary subroutines that are not time-critical) is placed afterward.
One of the most interesting parts of the code is the fast scrolling routine. Scrolling is achieved by shifting the attribute bytes of the first 20 screen rows one character to the left. This operation is executed extremely quickly thanks to the DEFADD trick. The DEFADD trick is set-up in the subroutine starting at Line 260. You can learn more about DEFADD trick here (https://blog.jafma.net/2020/03/16/efficient-basic-coding-for-the-zx-spectrum-iv/) but for now it is enough to note that the attribute scroll is performed at line 70 with the command LET a$ = b$.
The screen is structured as follows: the scrolling area is completely clear (filled with spaces), and the scrolling graphics (pipes and sky) are rendered solely through PAPER colour changes. INK remains black everywhere. The first and last columns of the game area are filled with block characters (graphics mode key 8). This ensures that the first and last rows appear black regardless of the PAPER colour. The first row is used to prepare the new line that will scroll into view without being visible beforehand.

We use the first column to prepare the next column to scroll in, rather than using the last column, because column zero can be filled extremely quickly using a specific trick. During the initial set-up, the variable c$ is loaded with a sequence of filled blocks followed by a carriage return (CHR$ 13). As a result, printing c$ instantly fills the entire first column using the active INK and PAPER colours. When a sky segment is required, we print c$ using a cyan PAPER colour. When drawing a tube, we first print c$ in green, then print a substring of c$ in cyan to create the gap between pipes. Line 70 contains the code that draws the sky, while line 80 contains the code responsible for drawing the pipes.

The bird is represented as an @ symbol, and its position is calculated and drawn between lines 40 and 60. The bird is rendered in black. Notably, because the entire screen uses PAPER for the scrolling background and INK is set to 0 everywhere, the bird remains unaffected during background scrolling, resulting in a smooth, flicker-free scroll.

For performance reasons, variables are kept to a single character. As reference:
a and **b** are counters controlling the spacing between pipes and the pipe width (in character units),
c stores the row position of the pipe gap, which is randomly generated for each pipe,
y holds the bird’s current row,
e stores the bird’s previous row,
d contains the bird’s vertical velocity,
f holds the current score, and **g** stores the high score.

High Scores (and some not-so-high ones)

Competition here at Break Space Towers was intense on this one.

Initially, Dave suggested that the default high-score of 10 was a tall order, but ZXMoe scoffed at the idea. "I've gotten at least 12", he suggested, and the gauntlet was thrown.

Lee took an early lead with 13, before Dave focused in and returned a massive 29, following up with a mighty 41.

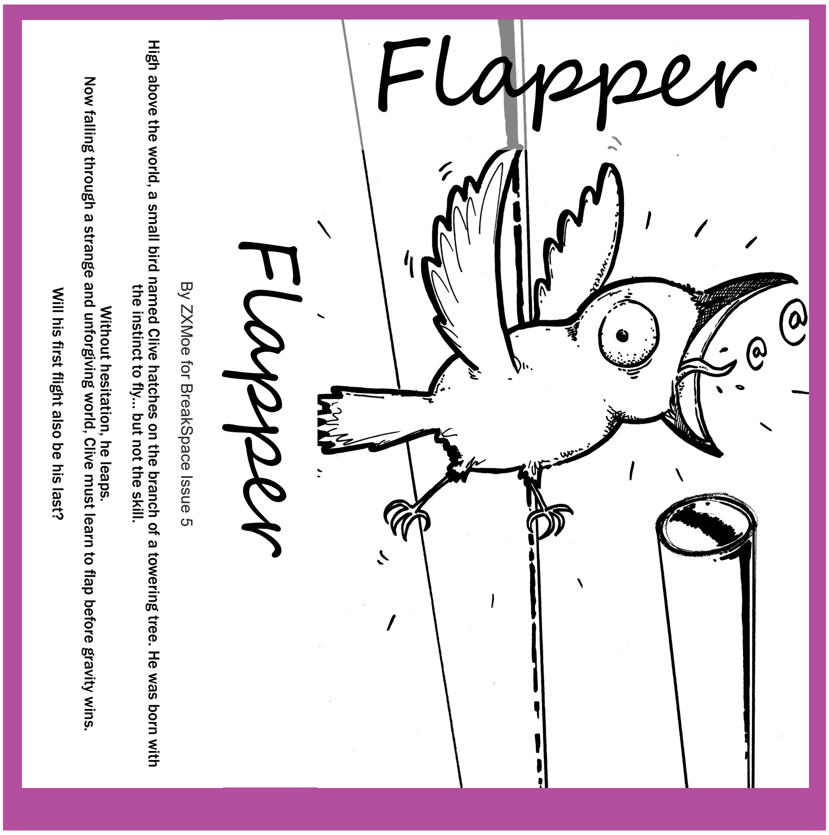
Sloany topped out at 21, Jon couldn't beat his best of 23, Jamie floundered in single digits and Shaun retired in frustration with 22, complaining that the bird should just fly *around* the pipes.

Mpk managed a respectable 33, but it looked like Dave's 41 would be the winner.

Until, that is, Kevin (The COVER ARTIST, mind you, not even a Review Crew 'expert') rocked up with a casual 43.

All seemed lost for the honour of the review team, until Jon pulled out a titanic last minute effort, recording 48. Blushes spared, the rest of the Review Crew declared a victory of sorts, and retreated to their cells.

Can you do better?



Flapper

Flapper

By ZXMoe for BreakSpace Issue 5

High above the world, a small bird named Clive hatches on the branch of a towering tree. He was born with the instinct to fly... but not the skill.

Without hesitation, he leaps.

Now falling through a strange and unforgiving world, Clive must learn to flap before gravity wins.

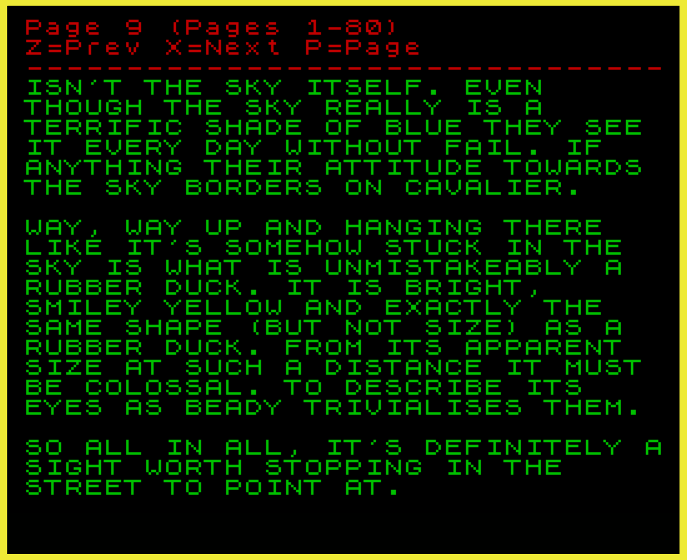
Will his first flight also be his last?

The Gang of Four Ride Again

Lambert T Marx

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45282

£3.17 (Kindle) / £10.67 (Cassette) / £3.19 (digital)



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Page 9 (Pages 1-80)
Z=Prev X=Next P=Page
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ISN'T THE SKY ITSELF. EVEN
THOUGH THE SKY REALLY IS A
TERRIFIC SHADE OF BLUE THEY SEE
IT EVERY DAY WITHOUT FAIL. IF
ANYTHING THEIR ATTITUDE TOWARDS
THE SKY BORDERS ON CAVALIER.

WAY, WAY UP AND HANGING THERE
LIKE IT'S SOMEHOW STUCK IN THE
SKY IS WHAT IS UNMISTAKEABLY A
RUBBER DUCK. IT IS BRIGHT,
SMILEY YELLOW AND EXACTLY THE
SAME SHAPE (BUT NOT SIZE) AS A
RUBBER DUCK. FROM ITS APPARENT
SIZE AT SUCH A DISTANCE IT MUST
BE COLOSSAL. TO DESCRIBE ITS
EYES AS BEADY TRIVIALISES THEM.

SO ALL IN ALL, IT'S DEFINITELY A
SIGHT WORTH STOPPING IN THE
STREET TO POINT AT.
```

A game by a guy named Marx, about the Gang of Four? This'll be interesting, right? An analysis of the actions of the politburo during the Cultural Revolution, the rise of the small group's influence following Chairman Mao's death, and their eventual slide from power. What does that mean for Marxism at large, and how has their actions impacted the rise of the current Chinese leadership? A fascinating topic, which would be hard to do justice in 48k.

But wait, no. It's not about *that* Gang of Four, nor the post-punk Leeds rock band. Nor is this a game, to be clear. It's a novel, or novella, I suppose, in a light-hearted science fiction style that invokes Douglas Adams, Red Dwarf and maybe Mel Croucher's Tamara Knight series from Crash. Anyone remember that? I didn't realise that 'Tamara Knight' was a pun for *ages*.

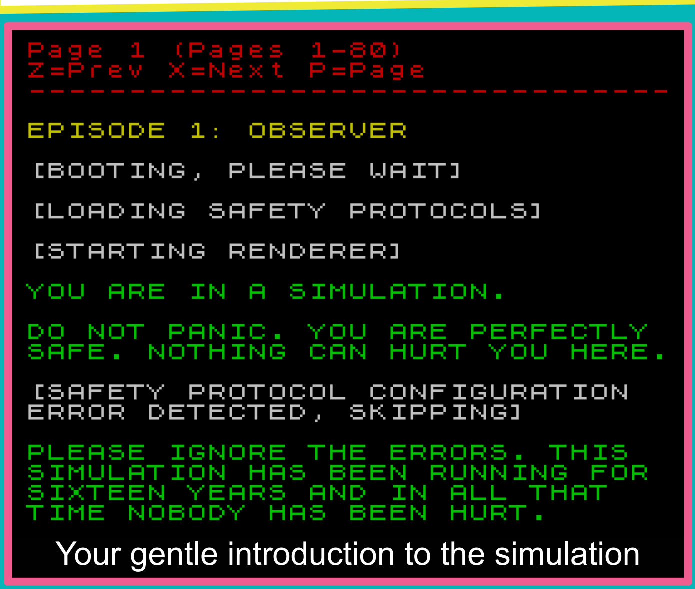
Anyway, this particular Gang of Four are a kind of sciencey superhero team, whose day begins with the sudden appearance of a giant rubber duck, hovering high above the city. They don't deal with it all that well, and the situation spirals from there.

Complicating matters somewhat, the characters and the world they inhabit are expressly not real, but parts of a simulation, which the reader is observing. Critically, the characters are aware of this, and the code-based nature of the world is unique and enables a wild series of reboots, version regressions, item corruption, alternate realities and general madness.

The tone is somewhat arch, but the jokes land well for the most part. It does feel derivative in some places - one of the Four is a super-intelligent computer that looks like a 48k Spectrum, and is written in a very *Marvin-from-Hitchhikers* fashion. But there's plenty in the simulation aspects and the overall plotting to keep things fresh.

You can get an 80-page preview for free, and purchase the full version for the Spectrum either on tape or digitally via eBay, of all places. It seems to only ship to the UK, so you might be out of luck if you're not based on Fortress Brexit. This seems like a flaw in the simulation, but Kindle and Print versions are available via Amazon, so that's something.

I don't know for sure if releasing a book (or a Choose Your Own Adventure without any Choices, as it refers to itself) on the Speccy is a good idea objectively, but not much about publishing for the Spectrum in 2026 is. An eccentric idea, well implemented.



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Page 1 (Pages 1-80)
Z=Prev X=Next P=Page
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EPISODE 1: OBSERVER

[BOOTING, PLEASE WAIT]

[LOADING SAFETY PROTOCOLS]

[STARTING RENDERER]

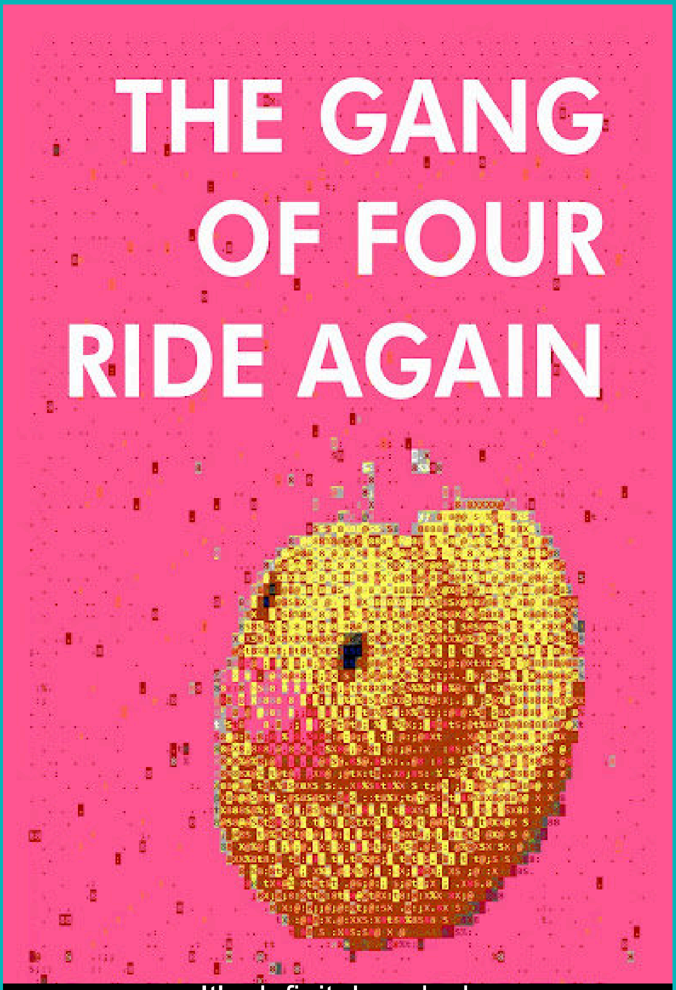
YOU ARE IN A SIMULATION.

DO NOT PANIC. YOU ARE PERFECTLY
SAFE. NOTHING CAN HURT YOU HERE.

[SAFETY PROTOCOL CONFIGURATION
ERROR DETECTED, SKIPPING]

PLEASE IGNORE THE ERRORS. THIS
SIMULATION HAS BEEN RUNNING FOR
SIXTEEN YEARS AND IN ALL THAT
TIME NOBODY HAS BEEN HURT.
```

Your gentle introduction to the simulation



It's definitely a duck.

A Mouse Life

Bad Bits

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45257

Free

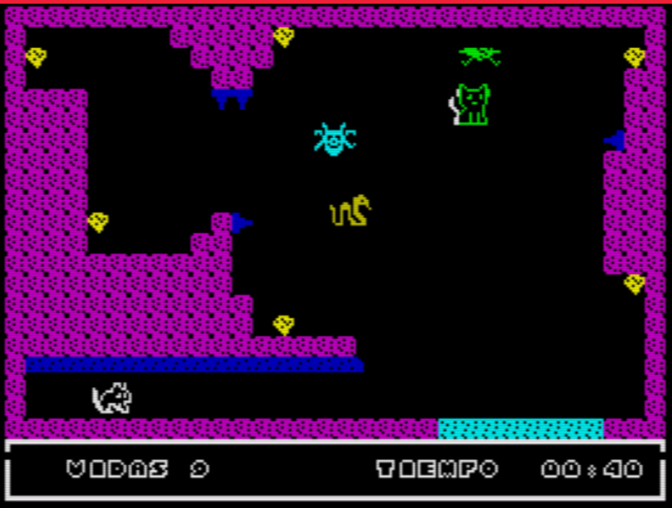
Mice – my most favourite rodent after gerbils, hamsters, squirrels, gophers, beavers and capybaras!

Living in the country, I'm no stranger to mice. Unfortunately, I really don't think they are represented realistically in games and media. For instance, I've never seen Mickey chew through an electrical cable to create a fire risk, or tear apart someone's loft insulation. He doesn't leave his droppings everywhere either.

But just how good a representation of a real mouse's life is "A Mouse Life?" Let's find out...

Well, he's crawling around on all fours and doesn't seem to be wearing clogs, so that's a promising start. He also likes cheese, so that's another tick in the realism column. But my experience with mice is that, above all things, they are quiet little creatures. This one (who you control in the game) makes a noise like a stuttering lawnmower. I think he can fly as well, but that just might be the game's odd perspective.

The game consists of about 15 rooms, and each room is filled with pieces of cheese. Break Space offers £5000 to the first reader who writes in and can correctly guess what the aim of the game is. (It's coming out of your own pocket – Ed.) OK, forget that, I'll tell you instead: you have to collect the cheese and move on to the next room.



I got cheesed off with this level...

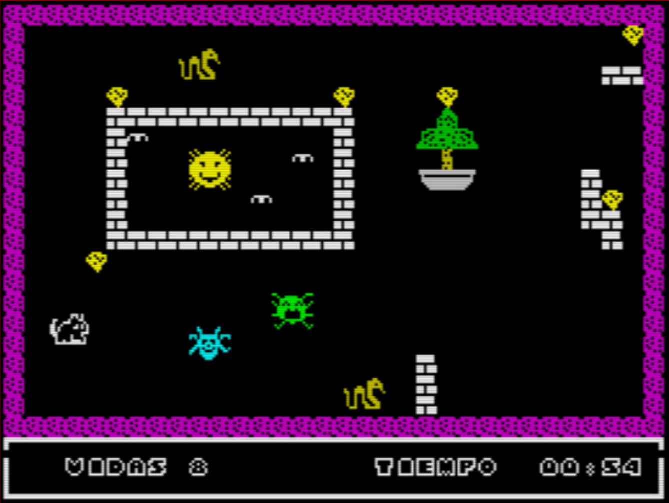
You have 60 seconds in which to do this. Run out of time, or hit a nasty, and you lose a life and all the cheese comes back, so the room has to be attempted all over again. Obstacles standing in your way are snakes, the odd cat, green slime which looks like that pesky little Germ-man (that's Germ-MAN, not German) from the Domestos adverts, and a turquoise thing which I'm going to assume is a spider. Whoever owns this house should seriously consider consulting Rentokil – but if they insist on leaving so much cheese about the place, they really only have themselves to blame.

There's no music. Just the sound of the mouse engine chugging along. All in all "A Mouse Life" is a playable little diversion – staggeringly simple and not very difficult, but it's also not frustrating, which is nice!

So, in summary, this is only the third most convincing representation of a mouse's life I've ever seen. (After The Clangers and Fievel Mousekewitz from An American Tail.)

Fun fact: the plural of a computer mouse is mouses, but what about more than one mouse inside a computer screen? I guess this would still be mice, wouldn't it? Before I go down another rabbit hole, this isn't the first Speccy game to have a Mouse as a hero. I remember quite fondly Micro Mouse Goes Debugging, which happened on the old ZX81 and Spectrum, and are perhaps the earliest examples of games that are both entertaining and educational. A Mouse Life is purely here for simple arcade entertainment though.

The 1-bit title music is slightly repetitive and in game sound effects are nothing more than plain, and graphically it's pretty good; no more than two frames on the software sprites it seems, but they do the job. The star of the show, though, is in its gameplay.



...while this level was cheesy-peasy!

Overall, A Mouse Life is a pacy collect-em-up very much in the vein of early 8-bit games that's great for a quick play through; collect the cheese, move on to the next level, and that's it. There's no pretence here: the difficulty curve is gentle and lives are generous. Your reactions and fine motor skills are put through their paces.

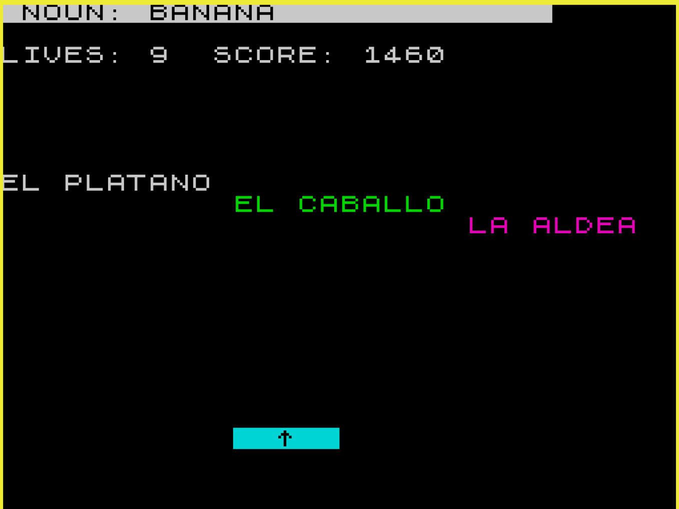
In a world where new Speccy games are often bigger and better than what we had in the 1980s, this is a good reminder that keeping things simple means keeping things fun too. It is great that I managed this review with no cheesy puns either, which was quite difficult as this game has a certain amount of cheddar appeal! (Groan - Ed).

Word Rush Arena

Hikoki

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45273

Free



```
NOUN: BANANA
LIVES: 9   SCORE: 1460

EL PLATANO
          EL CABALLO
                    LA ALDEA
```

Yes, we have no Platanos today.

There is a specific, scholarly charm to the ZX Spectrum that modern gaming has completely lost. It’s the feeling that a game was cobbled together in someone's bedroom over a weekend, fueled by tea and a desire to teach you something. Word Rush Arena, developed by Hikoki, captures this essence perfectly.

The concept is as pure as it gets: words fall from a jet-black sky like blessed manna from heaven. You, the eager linguist, must select the correct translation for a given Farsi phrase before the words hit the deck. The presentation feels exactly like you’d expect: written in BASIC, with chunky block letters in the usual BASIC font. But here’s the surprise: it plays smoothly enough. There is no lag, no flicker, just the well timed descent of vocabulary.

It is gamified learning in its purest form, reminiscent of a minimalist Duolingo. However, it crucially lacks the annoying notifications, the intrusive ads, and the pressure to maintain a "streak." It’s just you and the words.

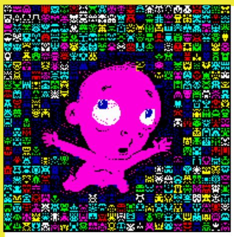
Is it a comprehensive language course? No. It is a flashcard gauntlet. With 300 essential words to master in the Farsi edition, it serves as a solid foundation for vocabulary building. Once you have conquered the Persian basics, you can move on to the Spanish or German versions available from Hikoki.

Regarding the German version, I felt compelled to reach out to the author with a suggestion born of practical experience. If you are going to get serious about the German language, one must be prepared for all of life’s emergencies. I proposed the inclusion of two vital terms: "Durchfall" (diarrhea) and "Donnerbalken" (a latrine; literally, "thunder beam").

I painted a little picture for him: a fictional warmonger, fresh from starting a conflict in West Asia, is now hiding in a quiet Berlin apartment to avoid the blowback. He watches the news, sees his campaign isn't going as planned, and feels a sudden, urgent need in his gut. He looks around and desperately asks his handler, "Wo ist der Donnerbalken für meinen Durchfall?". The author seemed receptive to their inclusion. After all, these are the kinds of culturally significant words I learned myself on the German government’s own website – Who said the Germans don’t have a sense of humour?

My interest in Farsi stems from a deep respect for Iranian culture; alongside China, it is one of the oldest continuous civilisations in the world. My current knowledge is embarrassingly limited to the numbers 0-9 and the word 'Iran'- ایران. While this game teaches vocabulary using the Latin script, my ultimate dream would be a sequel that tackles the beautiful, swirling Farsi script itself.

As for whether Word Rush Arena will help you "master" a language? That is a tall order. I did Duolingo for a year, et je ne parle toujours pas couramment français, ce qui est une grande honte pour moi!

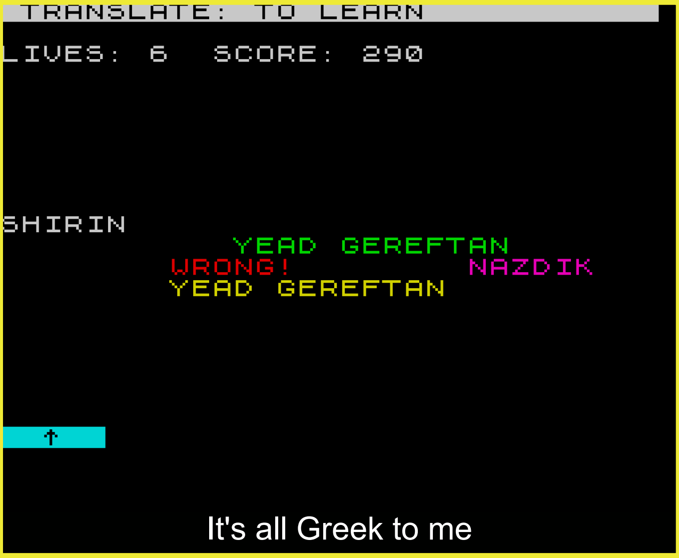


I’m constantly impressed by the tolerance shown by non-English speakers towards lazy Brits like me. The ZX-diaspora outside Britain are all willing to adopt English as a lingua-franca, yet native speakers starting bleating if they so much as see the word ‘Aqui.’

Perhaps this fig-ignorance was the lighting-rod that inspired the Word Rush Arena series. At the time of writing, these pedagogical shmups feature Persian, Spanish, German & Indonesian. Each one with the same mechanic: a word appears on-screen, and you have to select the correct translation from 3 descending options.

I concentrated on the Spanish version because there are over 4000 Spanish games in ZXDB, and unless a box of MIA games appears in a Jakarta loft anytime soon, I’m unlikely to need Indonesian.

You have a choice of playing nouns, adjectives, verbs, conjugations & linking words. Nouns are the most fun and easiest for the casual player—most of us can make a wild stab in the dark that the Spanish for ‘The Menu’ is probably ‘El Menu’ and not ‘El Helicoptero,’ for example. But the other options are useful, and you’ll find yourself learning whether you like it or not.



```
TRANSLATE: TO LEARN
LIVES: 6   SCORE: 290

SHIRIN
           YEAD GEREFTAN
        WRONG!          NAZDIK
        YEAD GEREFTAN
```

It's all Greek to me

Is this a rival modern for apps like Duolingo? Well no, but you’ll never master a language unless you have a *need* for it, and Word Rush Arena is a genuinely useful tool to help with that.

Arctic Onslaught

The Death Squad

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45244

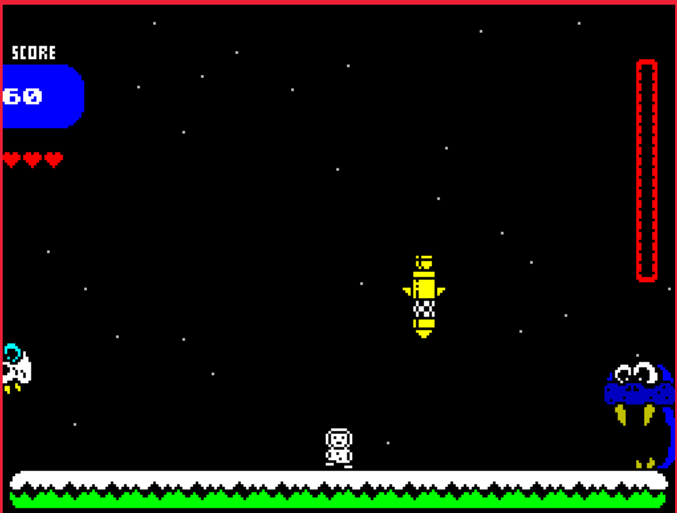
PWYW / $2

You ever have that nightmare where you're on an icy lake and you can't stop skidding so you're constantly, frantically, trying to run one way or the other to avoid the constant barrage of bombs that are hurtling towards you, and you can't get off the ice either because of the giant hungry sealions on either side and you're not wearing any trousers and the whole school is watching and you see your crush in the crowd and they make eye contact and they're laughing at you ?

Well then - have we got the game for you!

Apart from the bit about the school, Arctic Onslaught cover the rest of that scenario comprehensively. You control a little guy, who may or may not be wearing trousers under their heavy coat, who just has to survive an incoming bombardment of bombs and missiles by moving left and right.

Sounds straightforward, but of course it's not so easy. Once you start moving, you can't stop, although you can switch directions. The projectiles start out as a thin scattering but progress to a steady hail, and of course if you stray too far sideways you're under risk of sealion attack, which no-one wants. Messy, I'd imagine.



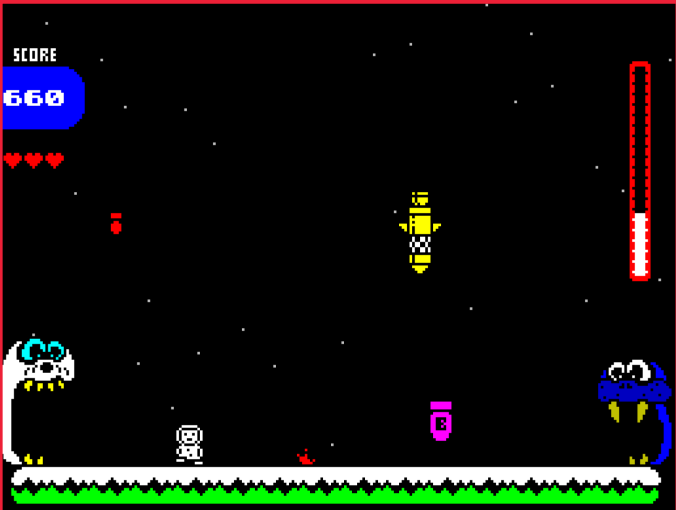
That's Dion on the right.

There are also diamonds which fall from the sky for extra points, which is nice, but the ordeal is challenging enough without caring about your score.

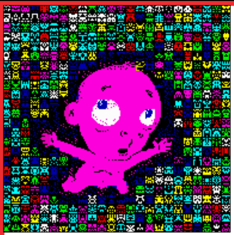
As ever with this team, the graphics are drawn with a bright and colourful cartoony style and everything is very crisp and pleasing to behold. The sealions are both charismatic and terrifying, and the bombs range from large cruise-missile looking deals to little fellas that look like they've been chucked overboard out of a Sopwith Camel. There's an occasional paratrooper as well, although thankfully these seem to explode on impact just as the bombs do so you don't have to worry about on-foot pursuit.

It's a simple pleasure - not one you'll be coming back to regularly, but worth a few plays. It's not easy to get to the end - you've got 3 lives to outlast the lengthy timer and it's quite the challenge.

The last time we checked in with the Death Squad, they were parroting some grifter nonsense about beating up teachers or something, and now they seem to have moved on to international non-events, this one inspired by recent US threats to invade Greenland. Progress?



Tough crowd



The way the things are going, by the time this review is in print, the US and UK will be at war over the sovereignty of Muckle Flugga, and Russian troops will be landing at Cromer. At least Arctic Onslaught, the latest game from The Death Squad, is on sturdier ground. Unlike poor Nanook—the protagonist of this game who finds himself with polar bears to the left of him (sea-lions, Ed?), walruses to the right, and here he is stuck in the middle with Donald Trump and a hailstorm of soon to be exploded ordnance. Catchy.

As Ed says, it’s simple, and a pleasure, but I disagree that it lacks longevity. It reminds me of oldschool classics like Nifty Lifty, where you have two-finger twitch mechanics and a clear goal that’s easy to approach but hard to attain.

It may be closer to a minigame than a game, but that doesn’t mean it’s lazily designed. If the pattern of falling bombs and chomping baddies was entirely random, then there’d be more places to hide. The planning shows up when you try to do exactly that. In fact goal hanging at the sides, or sitting on the spot (at the start) is more jeopardous than playing properly—every time I tried it I soon found myself hemmed in with the unenviable choice of whether to die by missile or mandible.

While Arctic Onslaught does have a touch of the polemic about it, it’s done in a way where you can wonder where the author’s coming from, whether you agree, and still enjoy some pure arcade fun regardless.

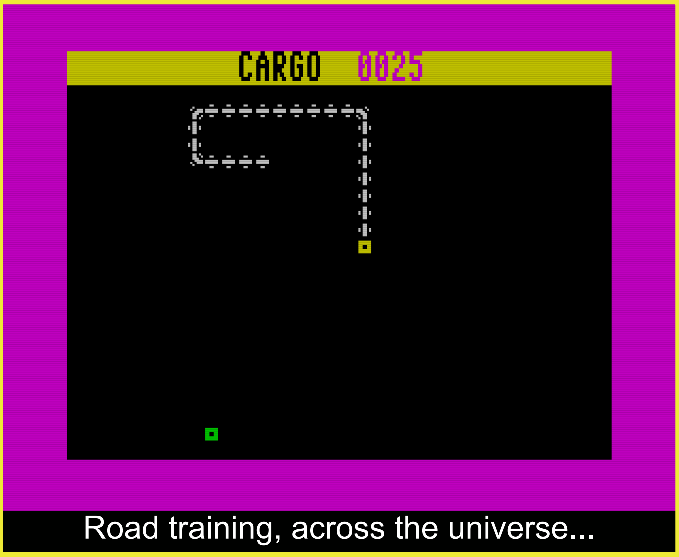
(The Dion joke only works if they're sea-lions. If it works at all. - Ed)

Road Train

Syntax ErrorSoftware

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45274

Free



Road training, across the universe...

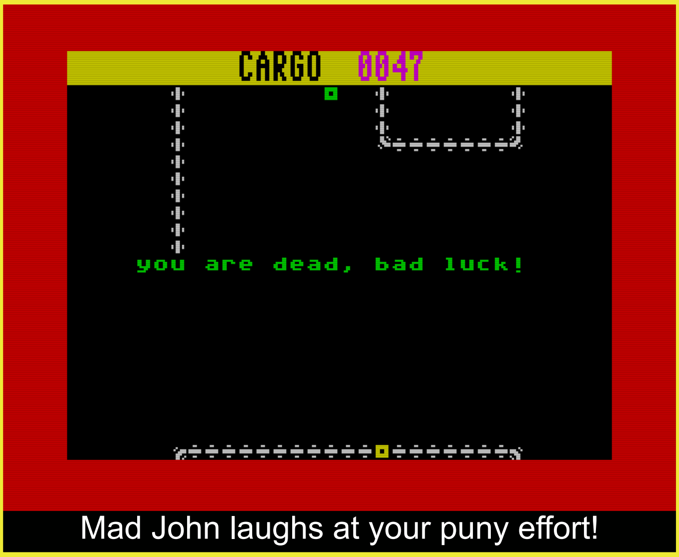
Let's get this out of the way up front - I had absolutely no idea what a 'road train' was until I went and looked it up. To save you the trouble, it's basically an articulated lorry with many, many trailers attached to the back rather than the usual one, and it appears to be the kind of thing that mad Australians try to break world records with in between episodes of Neighbours. Fun fact: the current record for the longest road train is 113 trailers, held by 70-year-old John Atkinson. Which is insane on just about every level when you think about it.

Luckily you're not trapped in the Australian outback with a mad pensioner and his five-mile-long truck in this game. Instead, you are in charge of the truck itself, and your job is to drive around the screen and pick up cargo. Each piece of cargo you grab adds another trailer to the back of your truck, and the next collectable pops up at random elsewhere on the screen. Yep - it's snake, but with trucks.

Unlike some other snake games, there are no hazards to avoid here apart from your own tail end. Your truck has the entire screen to drive around (the screen is even wrap-around, so if you pop off one side you quite handily reappear at the other) and at first it seems quite simple and fairly slow, and you begin to wonder how you will ever lose. But this would be a mistake. Unlike a real road train, the more trailers you add to your truck, the faster it goes. By the time you get to 30 trailers it's clapping along at a fair old lick, and reaching 50 is basically the equivalent of trucking at warp speed - the game might start off ponderously, but it gets very difficult, very quickly.

And that's really about it. The graphics are small but nicely-formed UDGs, the sound is just the occasional blip when you pick up a piece of cargo, and your only goal is to get the highest score you can with your single life. It's very simple, but quite tense and fun once the speed ramps up to stupid!

The author created this title as a demonstration of his new Pascal compiler for Z80 and 6502 machines, Omnipas, and full source code for the game is available as part of the package, so you could try to make your own version with extra features! Which is probably easier than trying to beat mad John Atkinson's world record.



```
you are dead, bad luck!
```

Mad John laughs at your puny effort!

The mere mention of a new Snake game here at Break Space Towers causes Mpk to dive into a corner and gnaw on his own leg, while ZXDave froths at the mouth and throttles the copy boy. As for me, I haven’t played a snake game since the early 2000s, back when I had it on my Nokia. I used to play it constantly and became a bit of an expert (even if I do say so myself). I was so good "The Who" were contemplating writing a rock opera about me.

But then the colour Nokia came out, and with it, "Snake 2" - and I felt the focus had shifted too much onto fancy high-end colour graphics, and they had forgotten about the gameplay. So, my snake-gaming days came to an end… until now!

First off - is this actually a snake game? You take control of a road train, not a snake, and the two things are completely different. You’d have to be coming off one hell of a bender to confuse the two in real life.

The controls use the W, D, A and X keys, which take a bit of getting used to - and there’s no option to redefine them, which is a shame. (That said, the author has mentioned adding controller support, which would be a very good idea.) The road train can also be a little slow to respond to directions, which could be catastrophic for a real truck dragging 113 trailers.

I agree with Lee - the game is quite slow at first, and the playing area feels a bit too large. But once things speed up and you start to gain some length (oo-er, missus!), it becomes a lot of hectic fun. It’s also inspired me to create a game of my own - something a bit different. It’s called "Congo", where you walk around a dance floor adding conga dancers to your line while picking up piña coladas, all set to a Gloria Estefan soundtrack. Crikey, that’s a stonkingly good idea - I’d better get myself down to the patent offices sharpish!

Umbra (Part 1 & 2)

Darkside29

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45265

Free

I have previously confessed on these very pages that I've never really got on with adventure games. I didn't get very far with them as a kid, and that trend has continued into adulthood. So when a brand new two part adventure drops from the makers of the critically acclaimed Urkiola Trilogy, who should Mpk send off to review it? Why old Adventurephobe Sloany of course!

Anyway, to the task in hand, Umbra begins with your character in a bit of a pickle, you're in a spaceship as part of a cryogenically frozen team on an exploratory mission to the Helios sector. You awake prematurely due to a glitch, but all Hell is breaking loose with sirens blazing as you appear to be on a deadly collision course, what do you do? What do you do??

Ordinarily what I'd do at this point is move North, South, East or West, type in some words that the computer doesn't understand and then quit in frustration. Umbra however uses a clever multiple choice structure, which makes things a lot more accessible, bringing to mind the excellent "The Time Machine" by Sequentia Soft from a few years back.

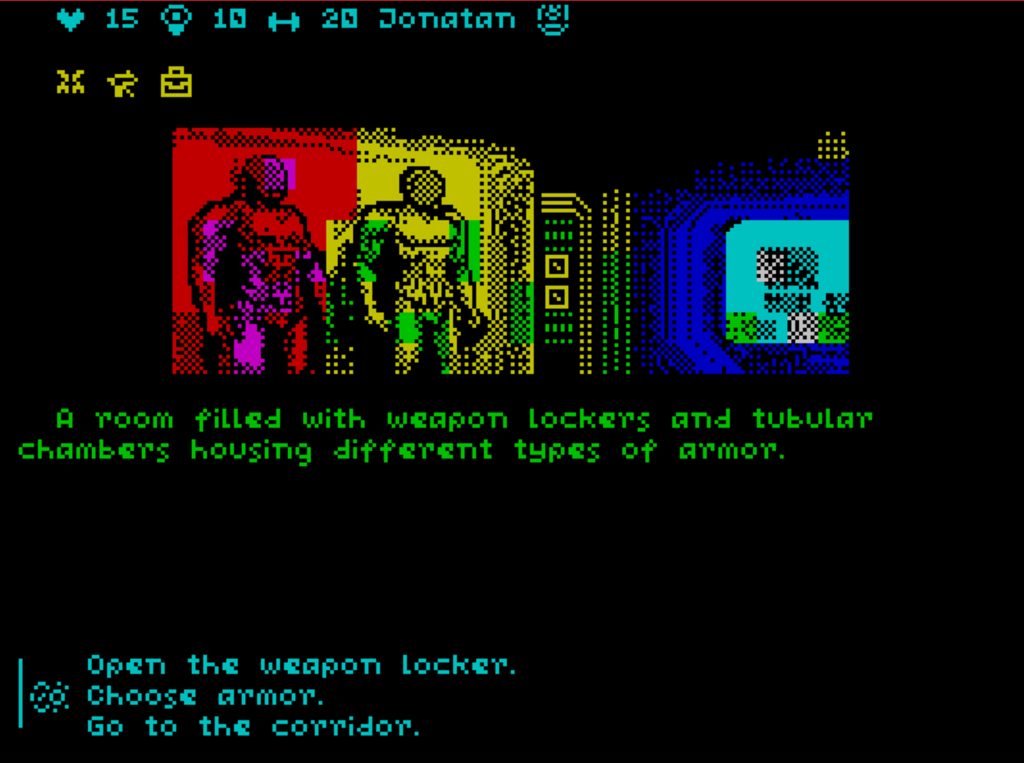
The mission sees you take the role of one of the three surviving crew members, each with their own strengths and weaknesses, as displayed by their stats in the top left of the screen. One of the first things you discover is that death is around every corner; I met him many times. Dying over & over can be a little frustrating but it's a process, and so long as you learn from your mistakes, repeated play should see you make decent progress.

I found that it's best to play this with a pen and pad, scribble a rudimentary map of the ship and jot down key facts you find along the way that may come in handy. Carrying capacity is limited, so resource management becomes a vital skill. When explaining the game I'm deliberately trying to be as vague as possible as it's really difficult not to give spoilers, suffice to say however that when you figure out how to eliminate a particularly annoying threat it's a real "punch the air" moment.

The sound is functional and initially the font isn't the clearest but it's not a deal-breaker, it's still legible and the prose really sets the scene and the graphics build the atmosphere perfectly.

The 2nd part picks up exactly where the 1st part left off and you get to explore outside the ship. Although I haven't managed to complete it yet, I found myself getting a lot deeper into this adventure than I normally do and a lot more forgiving of the dead ends and traps it threw at me.

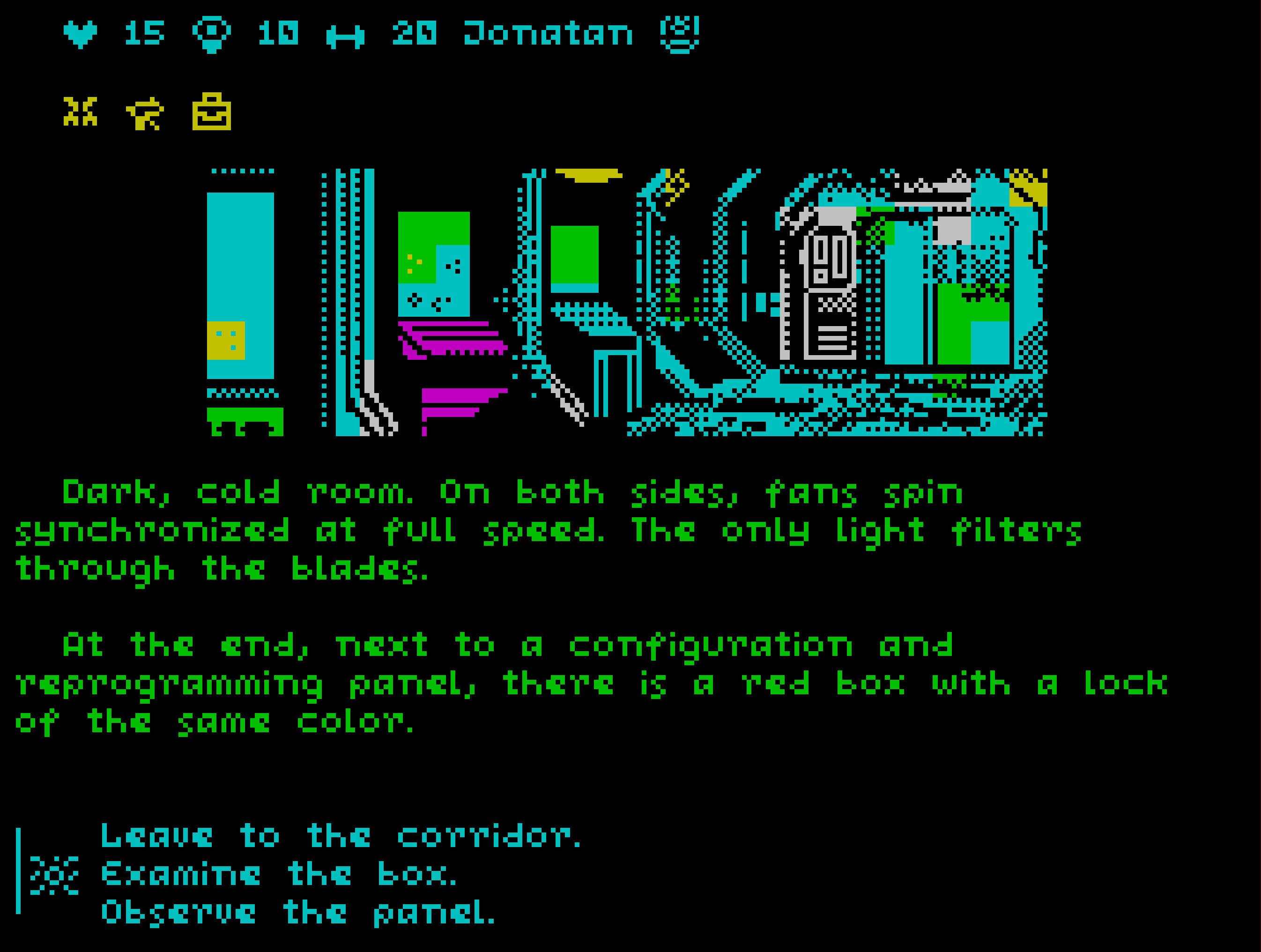
Maybe there was wisdom in Mpk's assignment after all. No, I've not had a road to Damascus conversion - adventure games still aren't my favourite genre but it was good for me to spend some time out of my comfort zone. I got to experience the rich storytelling, memory tests and puzzle solving involved in this highly polished series and Mpk got to sit back and nod sagely like some kind of Mr Miyagi figure. "Ability matters not, choices define the Sloan" he mumbles mysteriously.



A room filled with weapon lockers and tubular chambers housing different types of armor.

Open the weapon locker.
Choose armor.
Go to the corridor.

Choose life. Choose a job. Choose a career. Choose a family. Choose Armour,



15 10 20 Jonatan

Dark, cold room. On both sides, fans spin synchronized at full speed. The only light filters through the blades.

At the end, next to a configuration and reprogramming panel, there is a red box with a lock of the same color.

Leave to the corridor.

Examine the box.

Observe the panel.

What's in the box? What's in the booox!?!

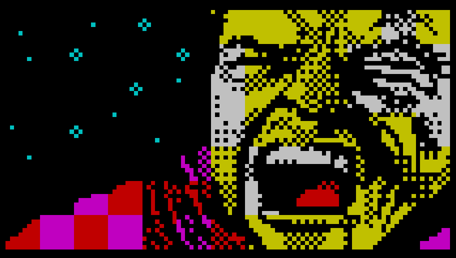
Unlike Sloany, I love my adventures! I'm also a big fan of space horror, so I was chomping at the bit to play this. Like “Big S” (Sloany), I also chose Jonatan as my character - the big, mean cyclops missing not only an eye, but also the ‘H’ in his name. I chose him not only because my name is similar (Jonathan), but because I'm also tall, and although I'm not a cyclops, I am short-sighted - so I felt some affinity with the chap.

The multiple-choice interface is an interesting mechanic, and a great entry point for people who want to get their feet wet with adventures but are a bit nervous (you snivelling cowards) about diving into a full-blown parser game. For me, it made the adventure feel a bit “on railsy”. Others will no doubt disagree - but guessing the verb is half the fun!

Part 1 opens with you awakening from stasis as your ship drifts off course - a cosy and familiar horror trope. The game then takes a handbrake turn into a fantasy world (cyclops, comely elves, mutants), which I didn't expect. It was then I started dying. A lot. For me, the best part of adventures is freedom and exploration, but here it often felt like I was walking a tightrope between life and death. I'd "lose sanity" and die at random times with no warning, and get attacked by horrible 'fings if I lingered in one place for too long.

Part 2 is a bit ToeJam & Earl-ish, as you search the strange alien planet for the missing pieces of your ship. Well, this strange alien planet didn't feel that alien to me! There's a shopping centre (with toilets), a hospital, a car park, and even an arcade with some classic retro games. It was good fun to explore - and I had no idea what would be around the next corner. And then… the genre shifted again! The space horror and fantasy elements give way to a post-apocalyptic zombie scenario. At that point, I wouldn't have been surprised if Elizabeth Bennet and Mr Darcy made an appearance and the game ended as a period drama.

Despite my initial disappointment that it didn't stick to traditional space horror, UMBRA is an interesting one. It's 28 Days Later mixed with Event Horizon and Dungeons & Dragons - and all based on Basque mythology. Each turn takes you somewhere unexpected, and the story and world-building are undeniably strong. The game is set in the “Urkiola Trilogy” universe - something I wasn't familiar with beforehand - but it's definitely left me curious to explore more of it… and well, isn't that the mark of a good writer?



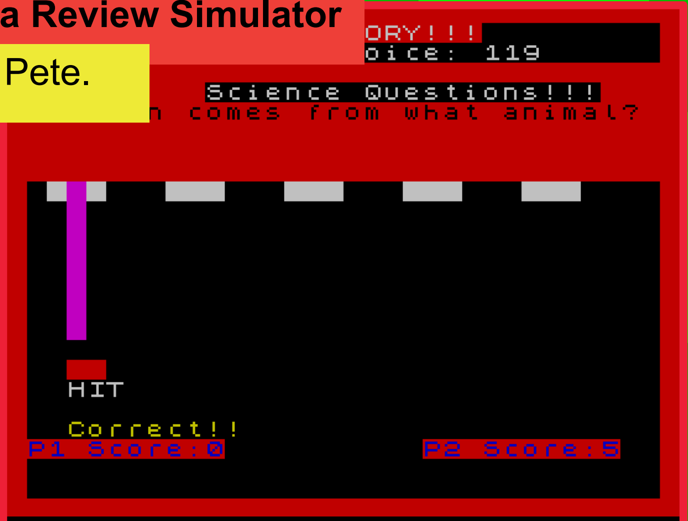
You have lost all your sanity. You are dead.

Computer Entertainment 1985 Arcade Trivia Review Simulator

Pete from Number Eight Software. Thanks, Pete.

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44144

Free, although I'd wait for a discount if I were you



ORY!!!
oice: 119
Science Questions!!!
n comes from what animal?
HIT
Correct!!
P1 Score:0
P2 Score:5

I got one right!

This unwieldy monstrosity comes to us as the winner of the 2025 comp.sys. sinclair Crap Games Competition (CSSCGC - see issue 4 for details). As such, it has the pedigree of being the worst game published in that competition, the lowest of, it must be said, a low crowd. If it were at Crufts, the judge would have lifted its tail and fainted dead away. If it were at the Winter Olympics, it would have arrived at the top of the ski jump in rollerskates and landed, mangled, in the middle of the curling rink. If it were at the Snooker Masters, it would have fired 3 darts directly into the black ball, exclaimed 'One Hundred and Eeeeiiihty' and passed out, drunk and micturating, on the table.

It isn't very good at all.

It's a trivia game. That's not a great start, but there have been some entertaining trivia games. It's all in the presentation.

This opens by asking you your first name, surname, then your nickname. It refers to you exclusively as Player One thereafter, which is vintage CSSCGC shithousery, to be applauded.

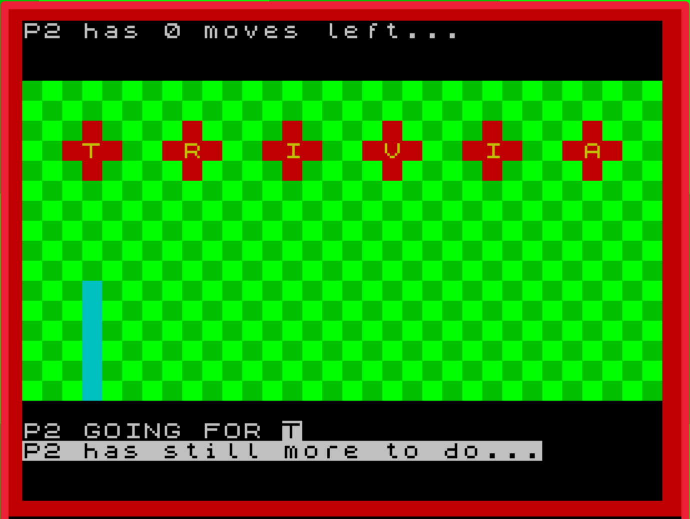
A series of long-winded screenwipes ensues, punctuated with review quotes for the game, none complimentary, which helpfully set your expectations at floor level.

Then the game starts, and you start digging a hole for those expectations. 6 feet should do it. The play proceeds in rounds - you pick a category by shooting one of 5 white boxes (This sometimes doesn't work) within a short and variable time limit.

Then, if that's gone well, the game asks you a badly-worded trivia question. You type in an answer, and it's probably wrong because it is / isn't case sensitive, or the question didn't make any sense. The game does not tell you the correct answer, naturally. Then Player 2 (the CPU) gets a go, and always scores a point. After a while, you get to go for a Trivia letter by moving up the screen depending on how many points you have. Typically, that's 0 points.

Play continues interminably, punctuated by long unskippable 'tunes' and flashing screenwipes. It is, frankly, a chore. I have not finished a playthrough. Nor shall I.

A worthy winner then, with some proper effort made to make things as miserable as possible. The spirit of the CSSCGC is in good hands. By which I mean malicious, mean-spirited and incompetent hands. Much like the rest of the world, I guess.



P2 has 0 moves left...
T R I V I A
P2 GOING FOR T
P2 has still more to do...

To win, you'll need 72 points. Good luck.

As far as CSSCGC entries go, this is one of the more ingenious - a game of a review of a game! CE85ATRS (as it will hereafter be known, although to be frank it's probably harder to type than the full thing) was Top of the Plops in the 2025 competition and thoroughly deserves the accolade.

The game starts out incredibly strongly with a long-winded and unskippable intro featuring quotes from the aforementioned review. Call me weird but I found this zen-like experience somewhat unsettling and I don't know why. But I loved it, horrible beeps and all!

Once you get to the actual quiz, things are no better. I spent ages getting no answers right at all and thinking that it was actually impossible to do so, until I realised that you have to enter everything in lower case - capitalisation will cause you to fail every time, which is especially mean when a lot of the answers are names!

In the best tradition of CSSCGC winners, the game pulls out all the stops to waste your time and kick your legs out from under you at every opportunity, from the infuriatingly long screen wipes to the repetitive, absolutely tuneless 'music', everything is meticulously designed to get on your nerves. The controls don't always work, the computer player never fails to score, all of the trivia category cards are the same colour to "simulate playing on a black and white telly", and the gratingly-long scoreboard sequence which plays between rounds is not only totally non-interactive, it actually takes longer and longer to complete every time you see it. Given this pedigree the spelling mistakes and poor formatting are just sprinkles on the top.

Putting aside the fact that I actually found answering the questions quite 'fun' (I know, right?), CE85ATRS is one of the strongest winners in a long time, and you owe it to yourself to experience it in person. Albeit briefly, for mental health reasons.

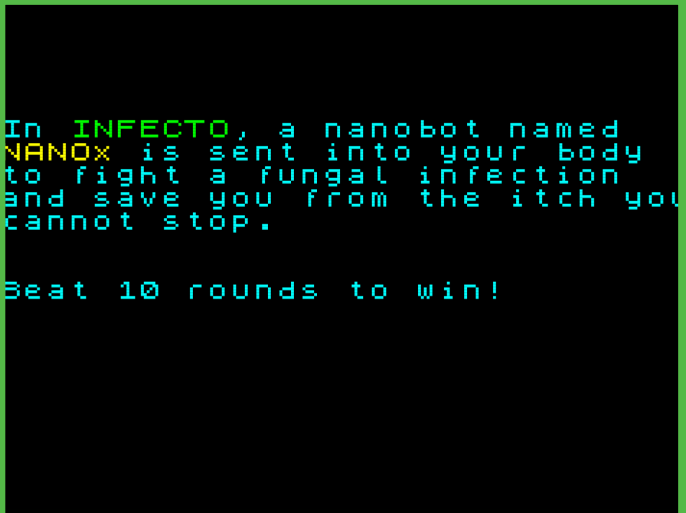
I very much look forward to seeing a game of this review of the game of a review of a game next year!

Infecto

ZXKerl

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44038

Free



In INFECTO, a nanobot named
NANOX is sent into your body
to fight a fungal infection
and save you from the itch you
cannot stop.

Beat 10 rounds to win!

Nanox - Does exactly what it says on the tin

Infecto is a failure. Not because it's a bad game, but because it has the dubious accolade of being the 'losing' entry in the 2025 Crap Games Competition, a title awarded to the game that's the least crap and (steady on) might actually be a bit good.

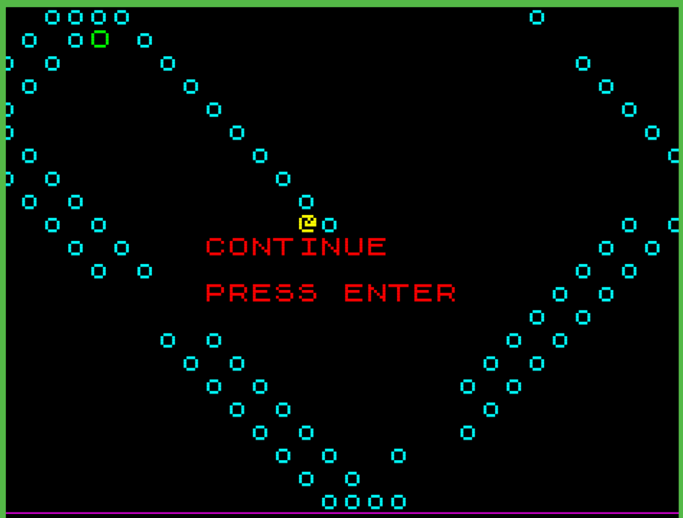
The set-up is classic CSSCGC however - you're a nanobot sent into a body to fight an itchy fungal infection. Lovely. Your nanobot is represented by a yellow '@' symbol which never stops moving and for some reason (cost-cutting, perhaps) can only turn right, which happens whenever you hit the walls of the level and also whenever you press a key. Pressing a key also causes you to fire a long laser beam before you turn, which is handy because the fungal infection (a green 'O') bounces diagonally around the level leaving trails as it goes. Colliding with either the infection or the trail will kill you and force you to start the level again. Zapping the trails destroys them, but that's only a temporary reprieve - you need to hit the head in order to destroy the infection properly. Wiping out all the infections on a level moves you on to the next screen, with one additional bouncy fungus snake to be killed each time. Clear ten levels and the game is complete, your reward being a score based on your numbers of deaths and shots fired.

My first impression of Infecto was that it was pretty fast and that I had absolutely no idea what was going on. The 'fast' turned out to be because the game is compiled MCoder3 BASIC (fancy!), the 'no idea what was going on' was due to the complete lack of meaningful instructions and my own stupidity. Once I'd figured out that it really didn't matter which key I pressed and that my nanobot was always going to turn right, I was just plain bad at it.

But then something weird happened. Despite the extremely basic graphics and sound and the maddening level of difficulty, I found myself repeatedly hitting ENTER to have another go. It's not as random as it first appears, and timing and forward planning is absolutely essentially to making progress. Although you have to restart the level when you die, the game doesn't have limited lives and I found myself thinking "I can beat this one". Actual skill requirements and addictive qualities in a CSSCGC game? No wonder it lost!

And there you have it. It sounds crap, it looks crap, but it's somehow... not crap. There's the nub of an actual game there, like something you'd play on your phone while you're waiting for the bus. In fact, this might be one that's worth polishing up and doing a 'proper' version of, which isn't something you can say about most CSSCGC titles.

So commiserations/congratulations to ZXKerl on their achievement, and better/worse luck for next year! It's crap, Jim, but not as we know it.



CONTINUE

PRESS ENTER

Just 287 more goes and I'll have it

Back in Issue 3, we looked at Kerl's Crabby Returns, which had an experimental only-turn-right control mechanism. We quite liked it, but did bemoan the slightly unresponsive controls.

Infecto takes the same control scheme, adds a laser and greatly improves the responsiveness. It's not any easier, of course, as there are a rapidly increasing number of obstacles to avoid, you have to be moving towards danger to deal with it, and it's fast enough to make managing the whole situation stressful in that lovely twitchy focused way that you want from an arcade game.

So then, we have to wonder why Kerl decided to submit this to the CGC, surely knowing that it was an improved version of another game he released last year. Everything works consistently, and the game even allows you to continue from the same level that you die on, ensuring that you progress and get to see the end. Nothing is frustrating or broken, and it's even clear what you have to do. It's the antithesis of Crap in many ways.

I guess he just couldn't help himself. I just hope it was worth it.

ZXKerl's punishment is clear - as the author of the losingest game in the CGC, he now has to host the 2026 event. This is underway, and if you have any aspirations to learn to code a Spectrum game, is absolutely the best place to start.

But if you do, be sure to play this : Not just because there's some actual fun to be had, but also a lesson to be learnt, and heeded, lest you be press-ganged into the Crap Mines to oversee the 2027 competition.

ANDREW RYALS'

HACK PACK

Yee Gads! Issue 5 and I'm still here... I volunteered on a whim and over a hundred hacks later we are still going strong. We are now in 2026 and the Speccy shows no signs of going away, in fact if anything I think it's more popular than ever. Although in this issue I think we are a little light with respects to new releases, perhaps this is due to massive output over Christmas, we still have pokes for 18 new games.

Games just seem to be getting better and better. Just look at Go-Go Bunny Gun this would easily have achieved a Crash Smash, YS Mega Game etc, then we have the very original Shift. The 128k version is a cracker, excellent puzzles and an excellent sound track to listen to whilst you pull out even more of your post-middle age hair line.

This issue of the magazine features my favourite poke of all time and that goes to Dr. La Mort with Corpse Decomposition - now that's original and the game is bloody rock hard as well!

Some pokes don't always work as you expect them to and Chromanoids is a good example. The level selection poke will work but you have to clear your current level of all aliens before it will take effect. You can always poke 52826,0 which will give no aliens on the level and this should jump you towards the level that you poked earlier.

Thanks for looking and let's do it all again in the next issue.
Stay tuned........

A Mouse Life

26233,0	Infinite time
35992,x	x=time
26848,0	Infinite lives
35973,x	x=lives

Artic Onslaught

32012,0	Infinite lives
29996.x	x=lives

Awass

25753,0	Infinite time
35894.x	x=time
29626,0	Infinite lives
35892,x	x=lives

Cafetonic

27087,0	Infinite time
36439,x	x=time
28416,0	Infinite lives
36420,x	x=lives

Galaxian '88 (Uruguay version)

54757,183	Infinite lives
60357,x	x=lives

Chromanoids

32430,0	Infinite Lives
52822,x	x=Lives
29900,0	Infinite Time
52835,x	x=Time
52826,x	x=Aliens
52834,x	x=Level

Demon Pages

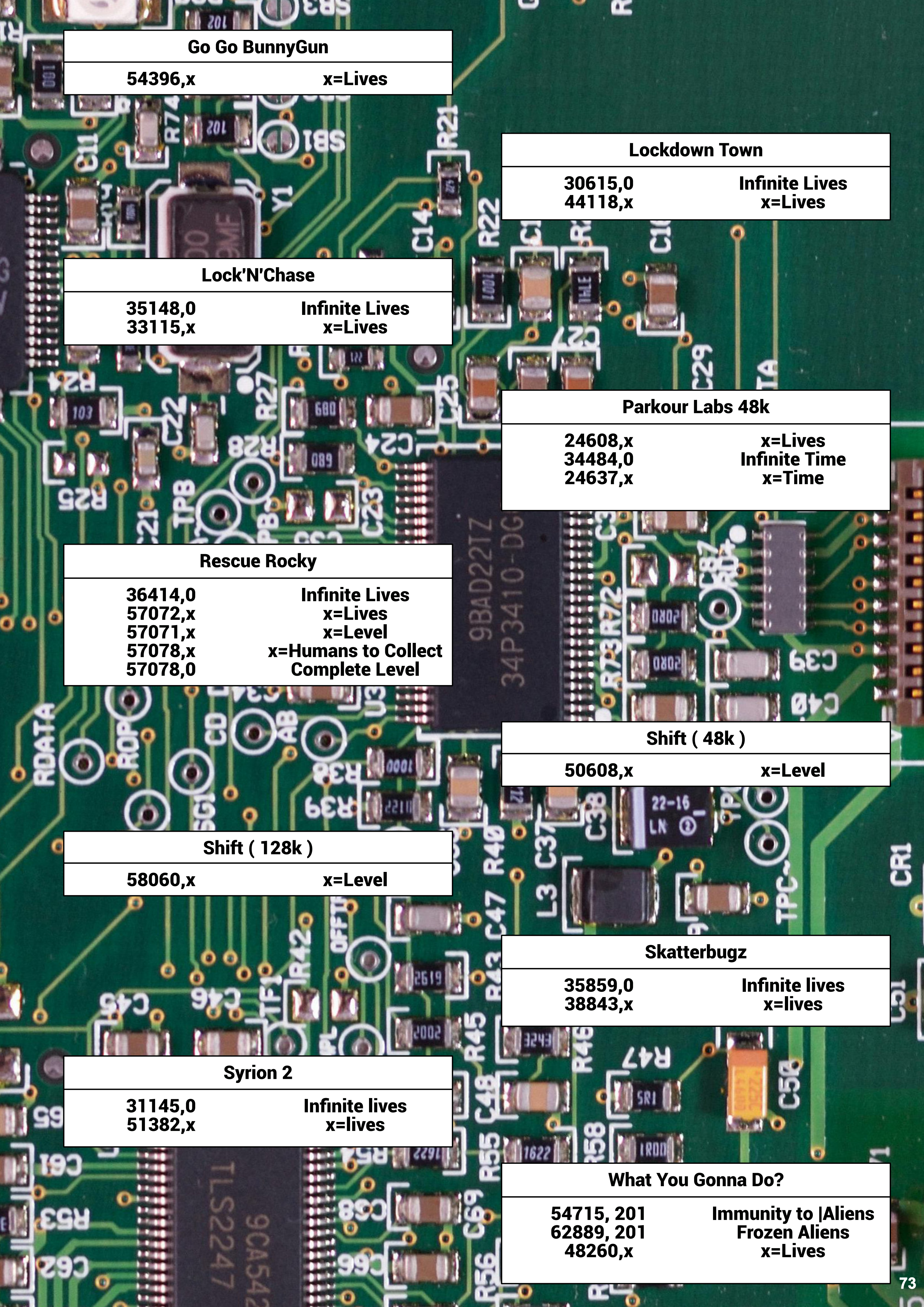
34251,0	Infinite Lives
24609,x	x=Lives
39314,0	Infinite Shots
24602,x	x=Shots
24601,x	x=Coins
24625,x	x=Grimoire Pages

Dr. La Mort

27891,0	Infinite time
44495,x	x=Time
44476,x	Corpse Decomposition

Escape from Twighlight Castle

41129,0	Infinite Lives
57737,x	x=Lives
57747,x	x=Time
39495,0	Infinite Time



Go Go BunnyGun

54396,x	x=Lives

Lockdown Town

30615,0	Infinite Lives
44118,x	x=Lives

Lock'N'Chase

35148,0	Infinite Lives
33115,x	x=Lives

Parkour Labs 48k

24608,x	x=Lives
34484,0	Infinite Time
24637,x	x=Time

Rescue Rocky

36414,0	Infinite Lives
57072,x	x=Lives
57071,x	x=Level
57078,x	x=Humans to Collect
57078,0	Complete Level

Shift (48k)

50608,x	x=Level

Shift (128k)

58060,x	x=Level

Skatterbugz

35859,0	Infinite lives
38843,x	x=lives

Syrion 2

31145,0	Infinite lives
51382,x	x=lives

What You Gonna Do?

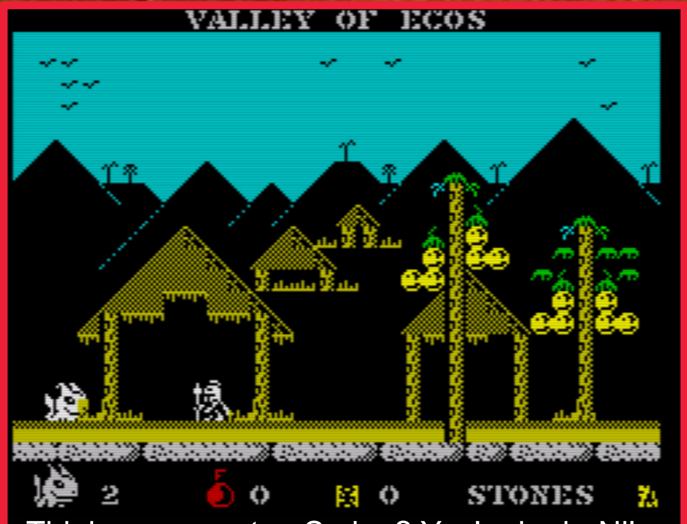
54715, 201	Immunity to |Aliens
62889, 201	Frozen Aliens
48260,x	x=Lives

Syrion 2 - The 6 Stones of Nefertiti

S&R

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45314

PWYW / £2



Think you can stop Syrion? You're in de-Nile.

Syrion II - The Six Stones of Nefertiti is the sequel to last year's "The Time of the Dragon". You once again play as Syrion - the least menacing dragon I've ever seen (he makes Puff the Magic Dragon look blood thirsty).

Our Syrion seems to be making a habit of poking his flaming snout into places it doesn't belong. This time around, he's mixing it up in "ancient lands" - which look a lot to me like Egypt. So, if you're going to continue this review expecting a bunch of Ancient Egypt puns, I'm sorry but I sphinx you'll be disappointed. *(That's quite enough of that - Ed)*

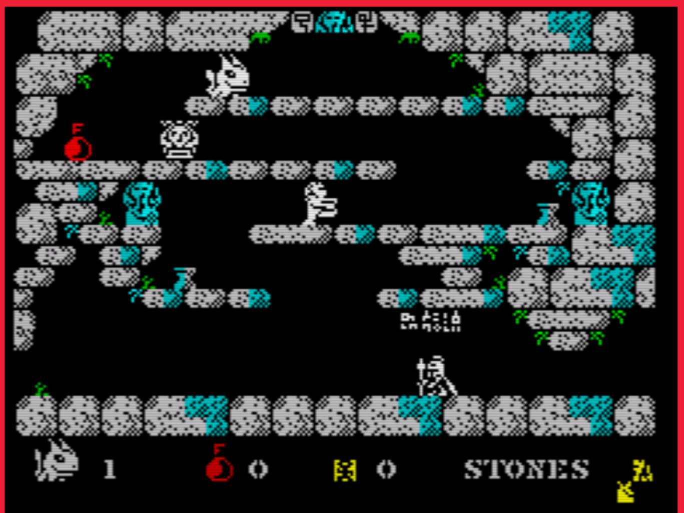
Syrion has tasked himself with recovering six sacred stones (they belong in a museum!), which will eventually - somehow - lead him to the lost tomb of Nefertiti. It's not entirely clear what he plans to do if and when he finds the tomb. Indulge in a bit of raiding would be my guess - and there's not much wrong with that! After all, we're all just out there chasin' dat paper, are we not? *(Don't make me send you on a course - Ed)*

The original Syrion was a bit of a hit here at Break Space Towers, narrowly missing out on an ACE. So, is the sequel bigger and bolder? Not really, no. It's actually shorter and easier than the first instalment!

Gameplay-wise, it's more of the same (which isn't a bad thing - the original was great fun). You'll traverse different rooms, avoid cursed mummies, and watch out you don't get hit by falling debris or things* dropping from trees. There's even a nice little nod to Indy Jones and the Last Crusade in one of the rooms which I enjoyed. (*coconuts? pine cones? I'm not sure! What grows on trees in Egypt? Note to self: Google this and edit it in later).

If I were to offer some light constructive criticism, the best parts of the game are when you have to manipulate the environment - pushing boulders over spikes to progress. If ideas like this were expanded and implemented more often, it would help the game stand out from the crowd a bit more. Maybe even a puzzle or two here and there - I remember the dragon Little Puff liked a good puzzle.

As it stands, it's a solid platformer. While it doesn't necessarily improve on the original (which I think was a cut above), it's still a good romp, and I look forward to seeing young Syrion in more outings in the future - perhaps Ancient Rome or Wookey Hole Caves? All in all, I'm RA-ther impressed. *(Okay, that one was pretty good - Ed)*



Anubisness as usual

Syrion is back, cute little fella that he is, and this time he's venturing into an ancient Egyptian tomb in order to recover the six sacred stones and uncover his destiny. Which once again means platforming around, shooting the occasional fireball, and collecting the various knick-knacks in order to open doors and progress further into the game.

I liked the first game a lot, so was quite eager to try this one out, and thankfully it doesn't disappoint. Graphically it's a lot more accomplished than the original, there's a nice tune that plays throughout in 128K mode, and Syrion is just as easy and pleasant to control as before. The map is well organised and easy to navigate, with new passageways opening up as you solve its various puzzles, allowing you to delve further into the depths.

Sisko and Roger have been a bit more generous with the lives this time around, too, which is good because you're going to need them - heading into Egyptian tombs apparently means you are contractually obliged to increase the "Rick Dangerousness" of your game. And this is where it starts to niggle me a bit, unfortunately - stones and coconuts fall on your head with very little warning, which turns each screen into a memory test that I found quite frustrating at times. When you die, Syrion is also sometimes dropped back into the screen by an exit other than the one you entered by, which is unfortunate as it often means repeating sections you have already completed.

I don't want to sound too down on the game, though - it's genuinely fantastic, with some clever tricks and touches to progression other than the standard 'get object, pull lever' (although that limited firepower is still occasionally a problem when solving these). It's definitely one I'll keep coming back to, and hopefully Syrion's third adventure can sand off those final few rough edges and give us the genuine classic that this very-almost is.

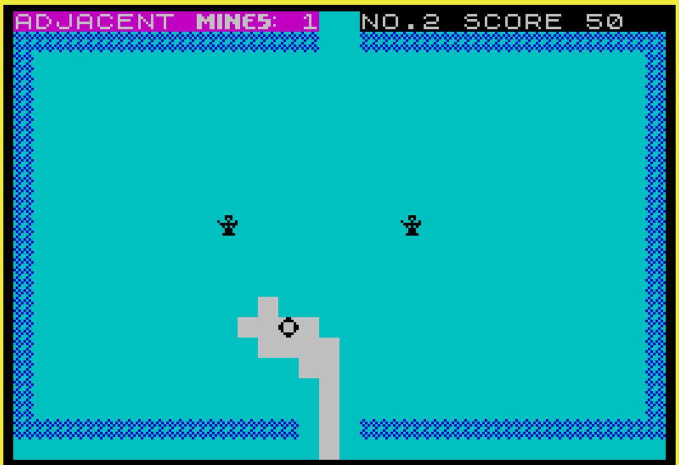
(Pretty sure those are dates not coconuts, you clowns - Ed)

Mined Out Faster

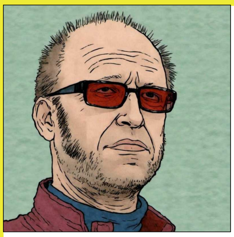
Theschich

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45216

Free



Step carefully. Damsel rescue is optional.



So what's new with this version of the game? Oh wait a tick, half a mo, back the flip up, I think there was a clue in the title…

It's a little known fact but Mined Out! was one of the first games I actually bought with my own money back in the day. That time between when I bought my Spectrum 48K in Boots in Hemel with my dad's hard earned money, and when I was a game reviewer and didn't have to buy games again. In this dark days I accumulated a handful of great little game cassettes which are still my go to games today: Manic Miner, Penetrator, Jet Pac, Pssst, The Hobbit and 3D Star Strike.

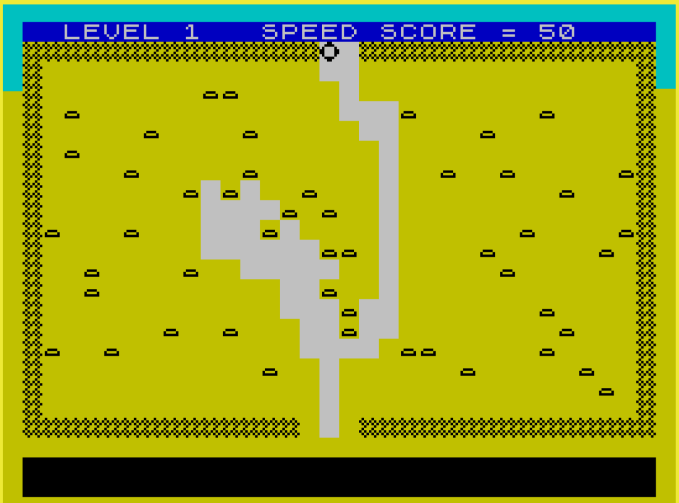
As one of a small number of cassettes on my bedroom desk, I of course played it TO UTTER DEATH. Back in the days when entertainment was sparse, you had a limited pool of games to choose from and boy you really got yer money's worth.

I was a big fan of the Quicksilva titles in general, as they always had really nice artwork and a piece of written backstory to get you in the mood. I interviewed Mark Ayles a while back and this was his idea, having a nice sci-fi premise to a game, and it's something many others started copying soon after.

The premise was very simple, walk through a minefield and don't get your shoes blown out through the top of your head. Luckily you have an elementary mine detector on you. Helpfully it doesn't tell you where the mine is exactly, but it does tell you that there is one within a step of where you are now. Logic, strategy and usually in the end dumb luck, will see you though.

This new optimised version of the game is developed in BASIC like the original, but using the knowledge we have accumulated over the intervening centuries since its release, it's now (gasp) faster. They also corrected some of the apparently egregious grammatical errors, thanks to feedback from nit-picky users. Never bothered me in any way, so I care less. There are a few different versions to download as the author couldn't figure out how to have them all selectable and keep it true to the original.

It's nice having a spanky new version, but frankly I never stopped playing the original and I never thought at any moment "this would be great if it wasn't so slow". In a sense I'm not sure there was a need for this version. That said I appreciate the effort and I shall honour that struggle by replacing the old version with this new version on my portable "Speccys".



Revel in your success with an action replay!

They say golf is a waste of a good walk. Now imagine that golf course is strewn with land mines. Worse still, you don't have clubs, because this isn't a golf game at all, but a high-stakes walking simulator – a Death Stranding demake for the ZX Spectrum? Too far.

You have to walk through 9 mine-infested screens. Why? I don't know! But there are tempting damsels of the distressed variety that will make it worth my while if I do. Well, that's all the motivation I needed.

Lucky for me, I have an alert system that tells me how many mines are adjacent to my current position. Unluckily for me, I am too thick to understand how that helps. At the same time, I am clever enough to understand how this information might help me navigate safely through the 9 levels. Sadly, I am lazy enough to blow myself up over and over again randomly guessing, rather than using my noggin. You see, I'm a man of immense contradictions.

I like Minesweeper, as a game. But somehow adding walking into the mix causes my brain to switch off. Is this, therefore, a game of Minesweeper ruined by the addition of a good walk? Nah! This is good. It's a basic game, but it's very smooth and responsive. If you like tricky puzzle games and have the patience for them, then this could be a blast! No, wait, that's totally wrong. If you're good at it, then it's anything but that!

MPAGD gets a tune-up with SBP

Just before our last issue went to press, we received news of an intriguing new utility by Tom Potter of Sausageware games fame, called the Spectrum Beeper Plugin for MPAGD.

We sent MPAGD fan Sloany to find out a bit more.

Sloany: First of all Tom, thank you very much for your time. Your SPB project sounds interesting. In the words of Cat from Red Dwarf : what is it?

Tom Potter : Multi-Platform Arcade Game Designer, or MPAGD for short, is the very splendid creation of Jonathan Cauldwell. It allows individuals not versed in the arcane lore of Z80 assembly language to make their own games on the Spectrum (as well as other Z80-based platforms like the Amstrad CPC and MSX). It has to a great extent democratised game creation on those platforms. However, MPAGD games can be quite easily identified from their use of the beeper, as they all feature the same signature beeps and crashes that MPAGD will generate. My utility, the Spectrum Beeper Plugin for MPAGD (SBP), seeks to add to the sonic options available to developers.

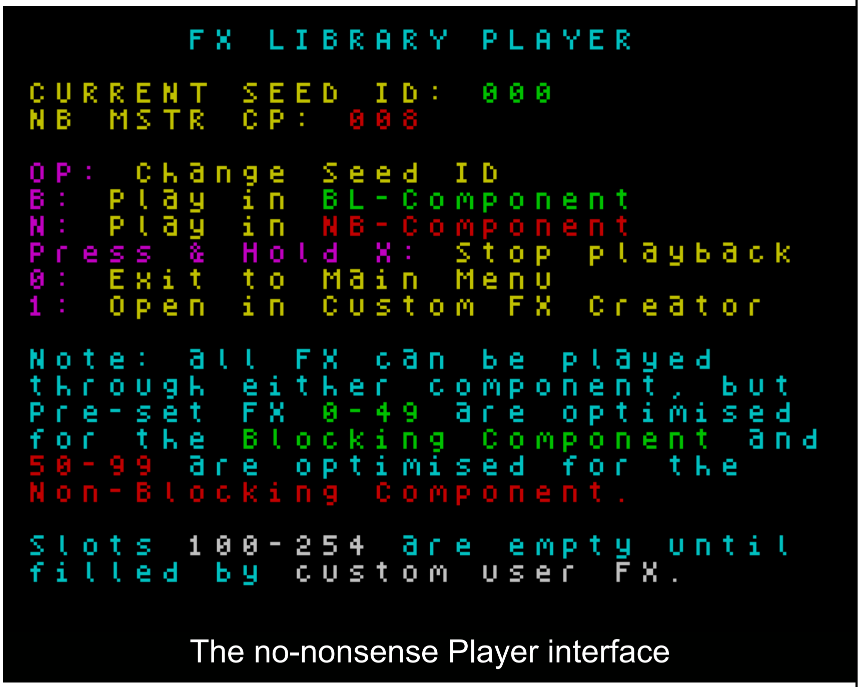
It's easy to use for both beginners and MPAGD veterans alike, and can be added to old and existing MPAGD projects as well as new ones. It's compatible with all ZX Spectrum models and allows simultaneous music playback from the AY chip. Users can employ the pre-set sounds or use the editor to create their own. It comes with a library of 200 pre-defined sounds ranging from tiny clicks to seriously wacky special effects, with space for up to 510 effects in total. Best of all, it only takes up 800 bytes in the Spectrum's memory (plus 8 bytes per sound effect used).

S: That sounds fantastic, I think there's a few Sloanysoft titles that could do with a beeper boost! So when and why did you come up with the idea?

TP: I was working on my latest game, Full Spectrum Defence, and felt I wanted a greater variety of sound effects. I'm in the process of learning assembly coding, and I struck upon the idea of creating a plugin sound utility as a good project to stretch my skills in that area. Therefore my game will be the first release to feature sounds from SBP.

S: I think it's really paid off, Full Spectrum Defence is sounding great. What were the main stumbling blocks (if any) in creating it?

TP: There are two kinds of sound you can make with the Speccy beeper, "blocking" and "non-blocking". Because the Speccy doesn't have a dedicated sound chip, the beeper has to be rapidly toggled by the CPU in order to produce a sound wave, and while the CPU is busy doing that, it can't do anything else. This means your game will "hang" while the sound plays. Blocking sounds are relatively easy to code and are great for use in menus, or when you actually want a pause in the action, but for general gameplay, they are basically useless. Non-blocking sounds are what you need, but are much harder to code, because you have to get the CPU to dissect the sound into slices and have a little slice of the sound play after each gameplay cycle, thus reducing the lag. SBP is able to generate both blocking and non-blocking sounds, and coding the non-blocking portion of the utility was really quite challenging for an assembly novice like myself. Of course, the pros solved the problem easily back in the day, but for me, it was a real head-scratcher.



```
      FX LIBRARY PLAYER

CURRENT SEED ID: 000
NB MSTR CP: 008

OP: Change Seed ID
B: Play in BL-Component
N: Play in NB-Component
Press & Hold X: Stop playback
0: Exit to Main Menu
1: Open in Custom FX Creator

Note: all FX can be played
through either component, but
Pre-set FX 0-49 are optimised
for the Blocking Component and
50-99 are optimised for the
Non-Blocking Component.

Slots 100-254 are empty until
filled by custom user FX.
```

The no-nonsense Player interface

S: Are there any plans to develop it further?

TP: There were two parts to the development. One is the utility itself, written in assembly, and the other is the sound editing suite that launches from MPAGD. I'm pretty pleased with the outcome, as essentially any MPAGD developer should be able to easily add it to their games, so I think I'll put it to bed for now. Maybe I could return to it one day, but there's no plan for further development at the moment. It's important to remember that every additional sound-bending variable I decide to add increases the amount of RAM the utility takes up. There's no point producing a sound generator that has millions of options, but greatly reduces the amount of memory available for the rest of the game.

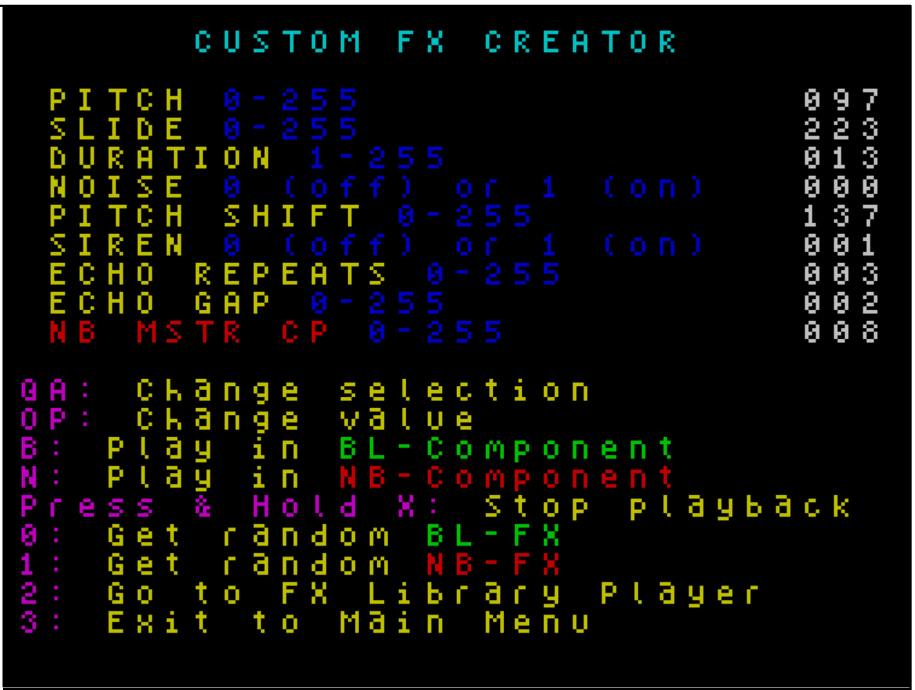
S: That makes perfect sense! Is it completely free

for people to use?

TP: Yep, it's a completely free download. Developers just need to make sure credit is given somewhere in their game.

S: Excellent! Where can folk find out further information about it or provide feedback?

TP: SBP and complete instructions for download and use can be found at https://sausagewaregames.itch.io/



```
        CUSTOM FX CREATOR

  PITCH 0-255                       097
  SLIDE 0-255                       223
  DURATION 1-255                    013
  NOISE 0 (off) or 1 (on)           000
  PITCH SHIFT 0-255                 137
  SIREN 0 (off) or 1 (on)           001
  ECHO REPEATS 0-255                003
  ECHO GAP 0-255                    002
  NB MSTR CP 0-255                  008

QA:  Change selection
OP:  Change value
B:  Play in BL-Component
N:  Play in NB-Component
Press & Hold X:  Stop playback
0:  Get random BL-FX
1:  Get random NB-FX
2:  Go to FX Library Player
3:  Exit to Main Menu
```

Build-A-Beep Workshop

Ah Tom, is it yourself?

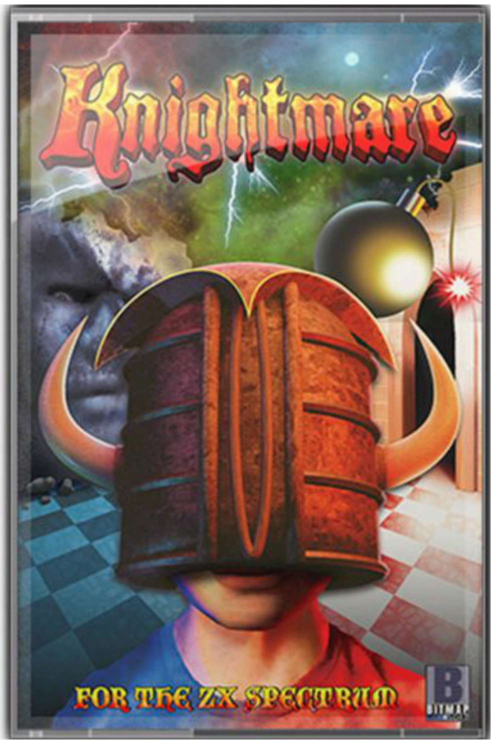
S: Cheers for that, on a separate note, have you any plans for future Spectrum games?

TP: Oh boy, do I! As you know, my latest game, Full Spectrum Defence, has just been completed, but I have several more projects on the go. Game-wise, I have plans for a side-scrolling shoot 'em up, a dungeon crawler, and even a Laser Squad-style tactical RPG. Additionally, I am continuing to develop my skills in assembly coding with some further MPAGD plugins. Alongside working on SBP, I've been developing a multi-loader which I want to use to add additional levels, etc, to my next game. Indeed, it's only with the use of a multi-loader that the game projects I mentioned earlier will become feasible. I also have some other utilities in mind, but I'll keep those to myself for now!

S: Well good luck with all that, sounds like there's plenty of exciting things in the pipeline. Thanks again for your time and thanks for creating SPB and making it available for fellow devs.

TP: You're very welcome!

Tom has 3 titles available digitally via https://sausagewaregames.itch.io or on physical tapes via https://www.bitmapsoft.co.uk



ZX SPECTRUM
S.C.I.O.N.
SAUSAGE WARE GAMES
BITMAP

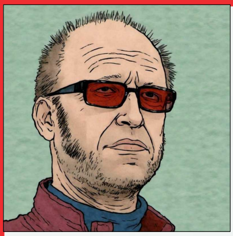
ZX SPECTRUM
FULL SPECTRUM DEFENCE
SAUSAGE WARE GAMES
BITMAP SOFT

Lock'N'Chase

Bob Smith

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45172

Free



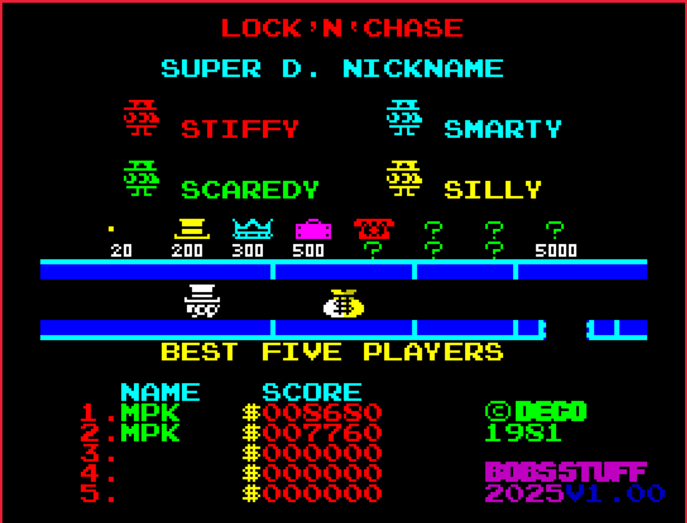
Now look here, I'm a fan of phrases with a big N in the middle. I like Fish'N'Chips for example and the tongue in cheek Rush'N'Attack. I also love the golden era of games written by Data East. They had a cool logo, were Japanese and they made a lot of my favourite games over the years, including for my first love, pinball.

So imagine how Chuffed'N'Delighted I was to see this really nice port of L'N'C by ineffable Bob Smith and the inestimable Lee Bee.

This era of games make the best ports to Speccy because let's be honest the old arcade boards were so limited in scope they made the Speccy seem wackily overpowered. That said it is a feat of genius to make such an accurate dupe of the original arcade, juggling colour clash and multiple on screen animated elements. Keeping it all smooth and fluid like this takes some skillz.

So yeah, to be clear, it's not a gulper collecting pills while being chased by ghosts. No no. It's a cops and robbers game. Alls you have to do is guide the "thief" (Lupin) around the "bank vault" maze collecting all the "coins" before making for the exit, whilst all the while keeping watch for the four pursuing "cops" (or Super D's) as they try to block your passage. And the other reason it's TOTALLY different from games like, I dunno, Pac-Man is that there are doors in the maze you can close temporarily to trap the gho…, er, Super D's.

Oh by the way the Super D nicknames sound like messed up dwarves: Stiffy, Smarty, Scaredy and Silly. I look forward to the appearance of Shirty, Arsey and Squiffy to complete the set.



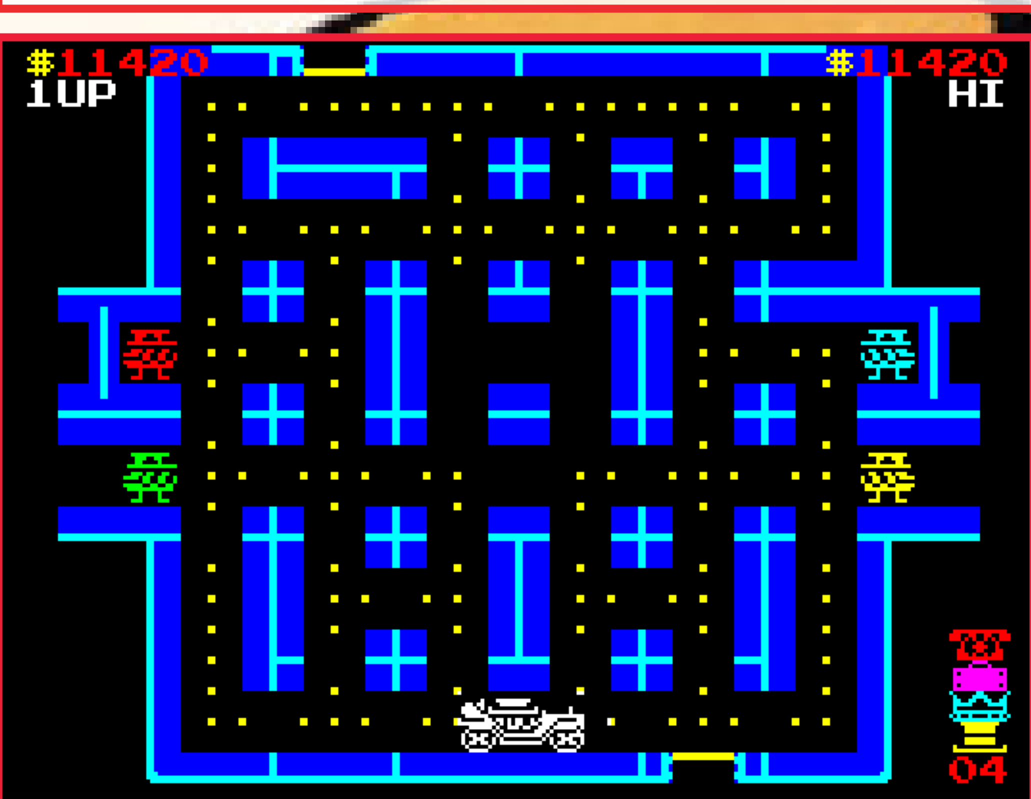
NAME	SCORE
1. MPK	#008680
2. MPK	#007760
3.	#000000
4.	#000000
5.	#000000

Nice nickname you have there, Officer

This is a fab version of the game for speccy, and I would expect nothing less from the authors. The audio and SFX by Lee Bee are top o'the line of course on the 128k version. Apparently the beeper sound for the 48k was by the mighty Allan Turvey. I didn't get to hear that but knowing Allan I'm sure it was amazin'.

All things considered Lock'N'Chase is a faithful rendition of the original game, it plays very nicely, fast'n'furious ya might say, as well as fun'n'frolicsome. It's not an easy game to master, and getting good enough to trip the doors so they trap the Super D's and not you is a challenge. I do love the game style though and it's pretty addictive.

Two questions though: why does he arrive in a car into the vault, and what kind of security system lets a thief OUT when the vault has been emptied? I think they need to review their Alarms'N'Security.



They see me rolling', they chasin'

I spent a lot of time in the arcades back when that was an option, and feel like I got to play a lot of the classics. This one though, originally from Data East in 1981, passed me by entirely. It's a Pac-Man style dot-eating maze game. This was a crowded genre at the time, what with Ladybug releasing that same year, and I guess we just never crossed paths. But never fear, Bob Smith (not the one from The Cure) and Midnight Crew are here to set things to rights.

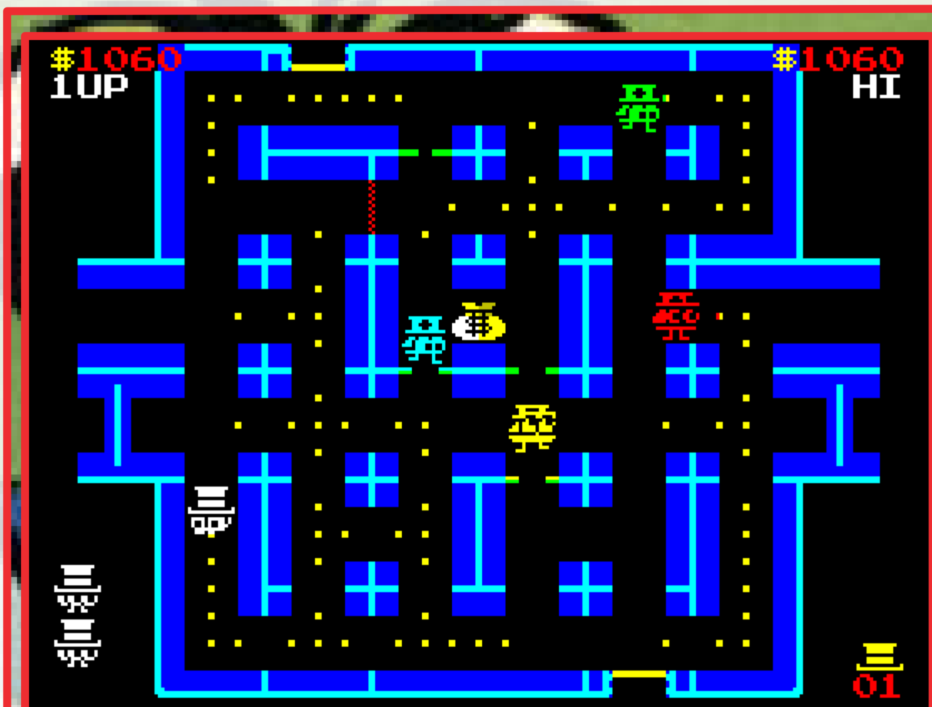
In Lock'N'Chase, you play a thief, who rolls up to the maze-like bank vault in his open-topped 1920s car and proceeds to run about the place, snatching up coins as 4 'Super-D' police officers chase him with varying techniques and speeds. That's the 'Chase' part of the title taken care of. Just the Lock part to go! And no, I don't know what 'Super-D' refers to, and I'm not going to ask.

It's all very Pac-Man so far. The big differentiators here though are the doors that will open and close on their own timer - leading either to your arrest or to an exciting getaway if you happen to sneak through while the filth are at your heels. You also have the ability to lock (There it is!) doors behind you - these will stay locked for a few seconds, allowing you to block off pursuit. But be wary - it's very possible to close a door in a panic without realising that you're going to need it and end up captured as a result. It's a neat twist on the formula. Each successive level gets tougher by simply increasing the frequency of automatic door activation, which makes it harder to plan your next move.

There are also high-value money bags that spawn at the center of the maze and which freeze the cops for a few seconds if you grab them - not quite as much fun as the Pac-Man power pills, but welcome nonetheless. There are also other treasures that appear at intervals for bonus points, much like the fruit in Pac-Man. It's almost impossible to talk about L'N'C without comparing it with Pac-Man, unfortunately.

This Spectrum version has done a top-notch job of capturing the pacing and timing of the original, which I dipped into a little as a comparison. The first thing I always check on a maze game like this is the pre-turning controls, which are a deal-breaker if they don't work correctly, and they're spot-on here. The player movement and interactions are perfect as well, with the ability to 'hide' in little alcoves formed by the closing doors working just like it should. The little cut-scenes between levels are present, much like the similar breaks in Pac-Man, and the graphics and occasional tunes are as close to the arcade as you could want. The 128k sounds and music are cheerfully noisy and satisfying, but there's nothing wrong with the 48k beeper versions either.

So, this is a top quality conversion, made with admirable attention to detail. Lock'N'Chase might not be in the same top tier of classic designs alongside Pac-Man or Ladybug, but it's not far off, and this is a very welcome addition to the Spectrum's growing pantheon of spot-on conversions.



Light blue doors close by themselves, red ones are locked by the player & the yellow exits open when all coins are in hand.

“Oooh chase me” as Duncan Norvelle used to say in an era when a snappy catchphrase would all but guarantee repeated TV appearances. It's also something I like to imagine our antihero Lupin shouting at the Fuzz as he capers around the not at all Pac-Man maze.

The original coin-op passed me by, so I'm grateful to Bob Smith for taking the time to convert this as it's not a bad little single screener. As with most arcade games of this era, there's no faffing about with complicated instructions, you can launch straight in. Just snaffle the collectables and avoid the baddies, who in this case are technically the goodies as you're a dirty rotten thief.

The closey/openy doors mechanic is what gives this its USP and helps it stand out a bit among its many many peers. The gameplay is smooth and the tunes and graphics are replicated extremely well. I'm not sure of the longevity of this one, just by virtue of the restrictions of its source material. It is certainly well worth checking out however and if you are up for a solid afternoon or two of score chasing fun you could do a lot worse.

Shiftex

Anate Studio

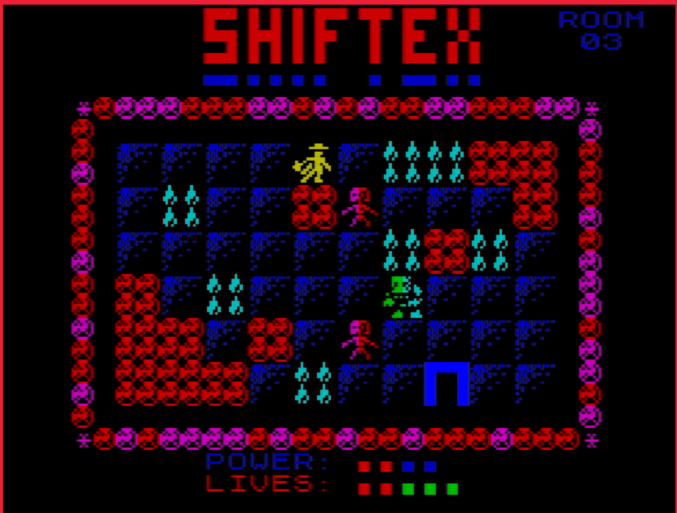
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45315

PWYW / $2

Turn based and dungeon crawler games are amongst my favourite. A purposeful trudge through dank, sinister caves and such makes for some very entertaining afternoons, and I find such entertainment wares being a nice distraction from the expedient arcadey type games that often pop up these days. Shiftex is an admirable BASIC effort, much like those early games from the late 1970s appearing on early Apple and Commodore computers.

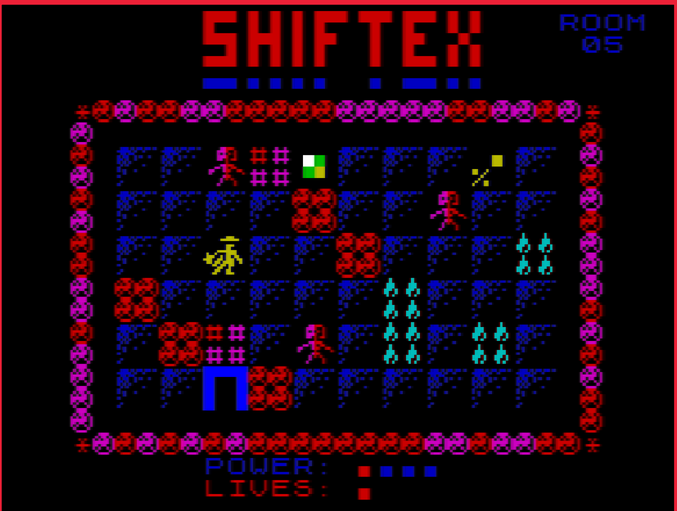
One of the things that marks this as a BASIC listing is loading it into a 128K machine; the “SPECTRUM” and “PLAY” command is shown on the title screen, as its interpreter has two fewer redefinable characters as I recall. So a “USR 0” before you load it is in order (or indeed the SPECTRUM command may be used here too).

You are welcomed with a short beeper driven ditty and a functional menu. Once starting, the objective is obvious; avoid the other cave dwellers and get to the exit. By building up your power, you can temporarily disable your mortal foes as long as those are directly above or below you, or to your left or right in a straight line. Note that you may only do this for every four steps that you take; your power is reset on your 5th or multiples of five. Each move is played in turns, with you starting each phase; to miss a turn, simply walk into a wall or an object. Step onto the exit to move to the next cave.



The right Shiftex

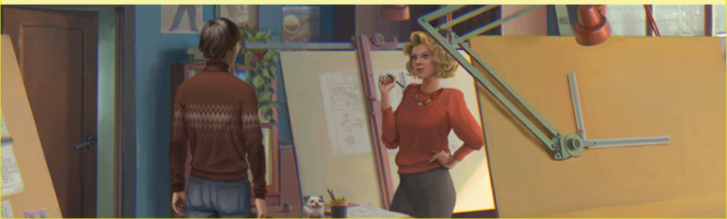
Shiftex starts gentle enough; there is no intelligence in the monsters in the first two caves, though each subsequent cave thereafter becomes more difficult either with crafty level designs, additional or new roamers, or all of these things. Sound effects are functional only, but does it need to be anything more? Owners of modern-days Speccy clones may want to ramp up the Mhz for faster playability, but I find its pacing perfectly good and quite enjoyable as is, though being something of a slog, set yourself some time to get into this. You deserve it, after all.



Shift Happens

ShiftEx is a change to Anate's normal output, which otherwise consists mostly of dramatic, well-realised, point-and-click adventures for Windows and Mac.

Check out https://anatolii.itch.io



Sumptuous graphics aren't usually associated with BASIC games, especially someone's first effort. But Shiftex shifts gears (if you'll pardon the pun) to deliver something that looks simply splendid. The fact that this is all achieved with UDG (User Defined Graphics) is tremendous. There's brilliant use of the ZX Spectrum's limited colour palette to create ogres, maidens, robots, and aliens – not to mention the title screen, where "Shiftex" is spelled out in an elaborate, custom font using nothing but UDG.

At its heart, Shiftex is a tactical puzzler. The turn-based gameplay sees you navigating a maze, avoiding baddies and obstacles, and heading for the exit. As you move, you build up power. Every four turns, you can fire it – though I'm still not entirely sure what it does. Occasionally it seemed to freeze an enemy for a few turns, but most of the time, it had no noticeable effect.

The gameplay is a little on the slow side, owing to the BASIC limitation. But if you're impatient, it's easy enough to nudge the emulator speed up a notch. Shiftex is graphically stupendous, musically slim, and atmospherically sinister. The puzzles are suitably head-scratching, and despite the slow pace, it's well worth sitting down with.

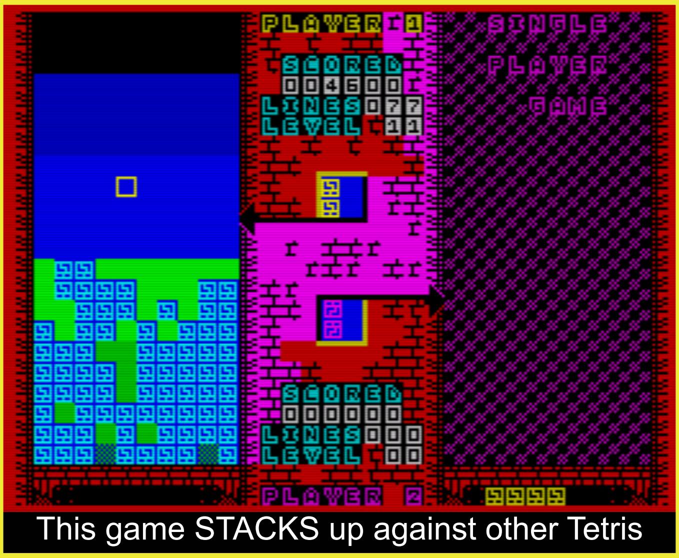
That's enough singing its praises – go give Shiftex a shot.

Priss Triss

KTB Productions

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45363

PWYW / $2



This game STACKS up against other Tetris

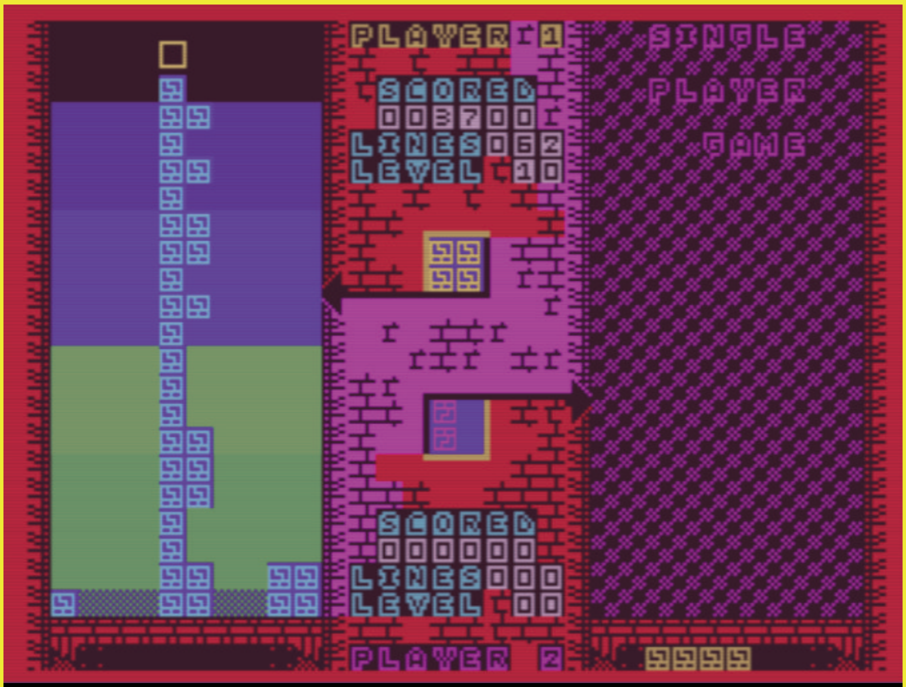
Tetris is a little-known puzzler that enjoyed a modicum of success on the Nintendo Game Boy in the mid-80s. It was designed and created by a Russian named Alexey Pajitnov. If you've never heard of Tetris before - and there's absolutely no reason why you would have - here's the rundown...

You have a rectangular playfield into which blocks of different shapes (tetrominoes) fall from above. Your job is to guide their descent, press a button to rotate them (if you feel like it!), and make sure they slot neatly together at the bottom like a jigsaw, the aim being to create a solid row of blocks. The speed gradually increases until things become a bit frenetic, and, if you're anything like me, you start panicking and pressing all the wrong keys. The original Speccy version was released in 1988 by Mirrorsoft to generally good reception - but, between you and me, I needed to lie down in a dark room for 30 minutes after playing that version.

So how does Priss Triss compare? I made myself a hot cup of coffee and booted it up to find out. An hour later, my coffee was cold and untouched. This game had me hooked from the get-go. It has it all!

Firstly, we have a storyline! Two sisters, Priss and Triss (surely Priss should be called Tett?), have a rivalry. Which one of them can build the highest - or the shortest - wall? As storylines go, It's not exactly John Grisham, but it's better than most of the stuff you get on Netflix nowadays. Secondly, you can redefine your keys - which the Mirrorsoft version didn't allow. For games that rely on quick reflexes, this should be mandatory! Thirdly, it's just so smooth and playable. It's made with MPAGD, surprisingly, but you'd never know it.

The icing on the cake is a pleasant little melody that suits the game down to the ground. If you hate Tetris, then Priss Triss is unlikely to convert you - and some of the later levels did begin to suffer from slight response issues when things got frantic (around level 12). The blocks were slow to respond to my frantic tapping, causing me to try and take a bite out of my laptop in fury - but that's the only grey cloud in an otherwise beautiful spring-blue sky. A corker!



I need to rethink my strategy

Priss Triss is the kind of game that makes you smile, scratch your head, and then laugh at yourself – all within five minutes. It's an admirable attempt to implement a two-player Tetris clone using Arcade Game Designer, an engine better suited to developing platform games. For me, it's a mixed bag – but an endearing one.

The tune, though short, is catchy and doesn't wear out its welcome, even after a long game – quite a feat. The graphics are fairly simple, but again, they work well. So far, so charming.

I must admit to a little silliness: I built my well (a solid wall four blocks high, with a perfect gap for the 1×4 block) – then realised there is no 1×4 block in the set. What's the singular term for a Tetris block? Tetromino? Well, they are definitely non-standard. You get a 1×1 tetromino that fits anywhere, a 4×4 tetromino that fits most places, an L-shaped one, and a little diagonal fella that is probably the most annoying. Yes, that same diagonal troublemaker would come back to haunt me later.

Personally, I found the pacing quite relaxed. It really gets going around levels 9 and 10, where I suddenly had to really concentrate – although I didn't last long. That diagonal piece? It was there, waiting for me every time.

Sadly, I didn't get to try two-player mode. Given the theme of the game, this might be where the game really shines. Sadly, we weren't able to have a Breakspace Towers play-off, we are a very introverted bunch! I can't help but feel that's half the review missing.

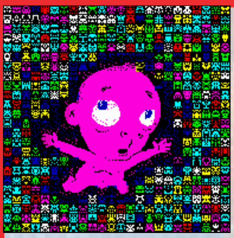
All in all, this is a great effort. And here's the real kicker: how this could have been made in AGD is a genuine head-scratcher. That alone makes Priss Triss a truly admirable feat – even if its blocks are anything but standard.

Sweet Fightin' +2

Presh

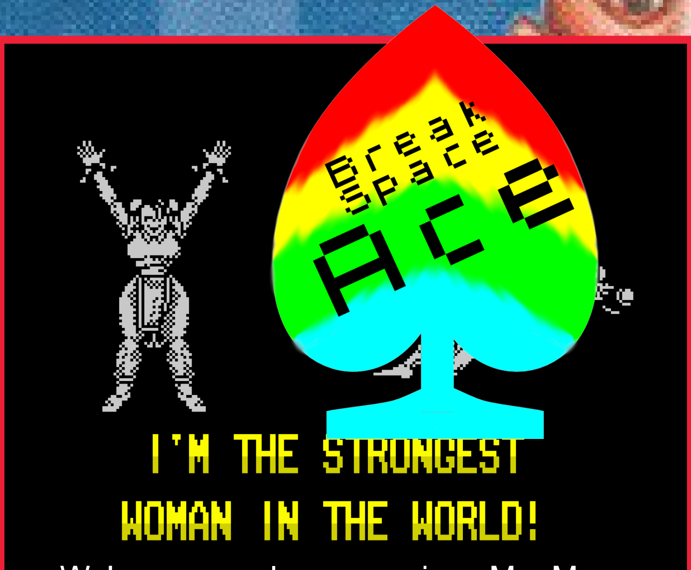
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45284

Free



On March 7th 1991, Capcom unleashed Street Fighter 2 on the arcades, considerably raising the bar of the beatemup genre, and emptying our pockets in the process. A year later, the home computer ports came out, in what can only be described as a conspiracy of publishers to convince the world to stop using 8-bit machines. US Gold did the Spectrum version, and let's say it wasn't great. Playing it now, I'd describe it as ambitious, but had I spent £12.99 BITD, I'd be cursing the multiload, the framerate, the jerky scroll, the controls, and probably the venerable John Menzies himself.

But it looked great, and that's where Sweet Fightin' +2 comes in, released in early March to celebrate 35 years of this brawling blockbuster. Presh has taken the best bits from the official Speccy port and ditched the bad—meaning he's kept the fabulous graphics and rewrote the whole game from scratch.



We've come a long way since Mrs Mopp

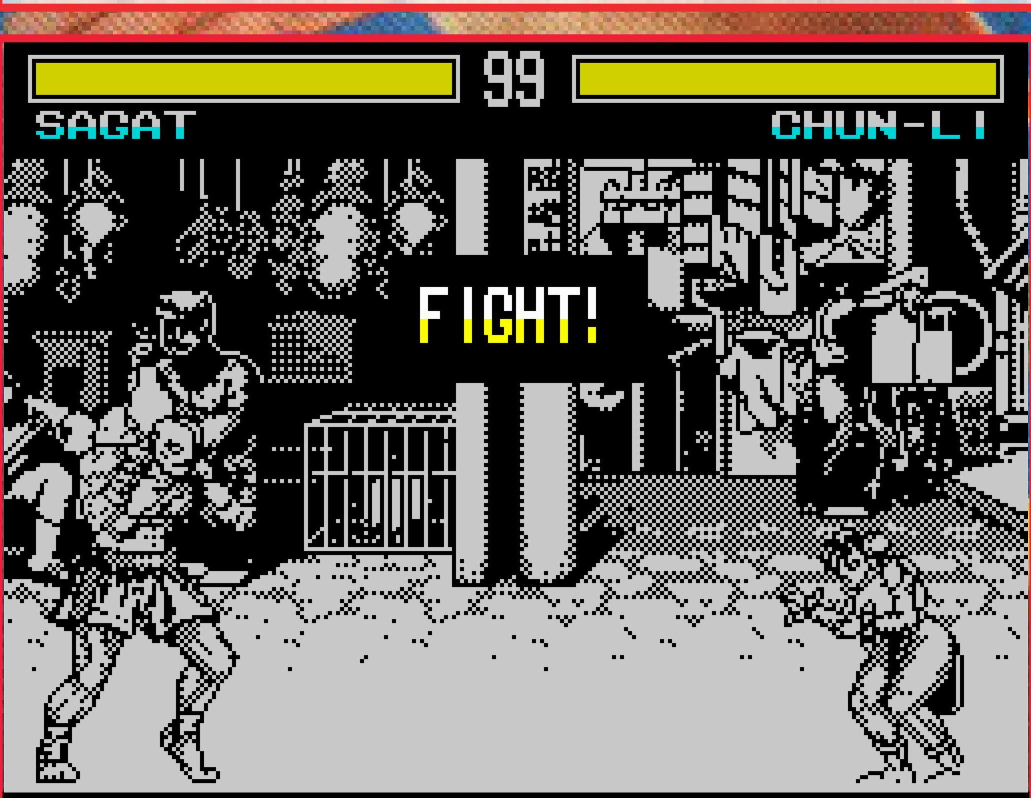
And boy was it worth it. It runs at around 12.5 fps, which is pretty much perfect for big sprites—and these sprites are bloody HUGE (in fact if you want a little dopamine hit, have a peep at the C64 version for comparison). The controls are responsive and fully implemented. The vertical scroll is smooth and no longer disorientating. The colour scheme is easy on the eye. The fighters have everything you'd hope for: Ryu's Hadouken, Guile's Sonic Boom, Dhalsim's Yoga Flame, Honda's Hundred Hand Slap, and the rest.

It was obviously an impressive game from the most cursory of glances. The technical wizardry was something I expected to revere, but what surprised me was just how much fun it was to play. The amount of thought gone into getting the difficulty gradient, controls, and opponent logic right cannot be understated. These are the most important bits, and are often the most tedious to develop. Presh has put in the gruntwork here, and it's the reason that playing on easy is a perfect entry point—you'll breeze through the start, getting slowly more challenged, before your backside is handed back to you by Sagat, if not before. And you'll go back for more.

Playing with joystick is recommended, but I've always been a ZX-keyboard warrior and that worked fine. Using combinations of direction + fire gets as close to the 6 damage-orientated buttons of the arcade machine as we're going to get. I had no problem performing the special moves either. Well, I *did*, but I spent no less time flailing about *trying* to do them as I did on any beat-em-up — joystick or otherwise.

But there's always a fly in the ointment, or an itch in Zangief's jockstrap, and in this case it's the 128K multiload. In realtime, it takes ~10 minutes to (Turbo)load the main engine and start playing, and then every subsequent round adds more, so you'll be twiddling your thumbs (good training I suppose) for about 45 minutes every full play. Though that's a big improvement on the even slower US Gold version, and this is all academic anyway—99% of us will be playing in emulators which load in seconds.

Sweet Fightin' +2 is the Street Fighter the Spectrum deserves and deserved. Presh—stand up, take a bow, and then take your place in the rock star programmers' Hall of Fame.



Go easy on him, Chun-Li

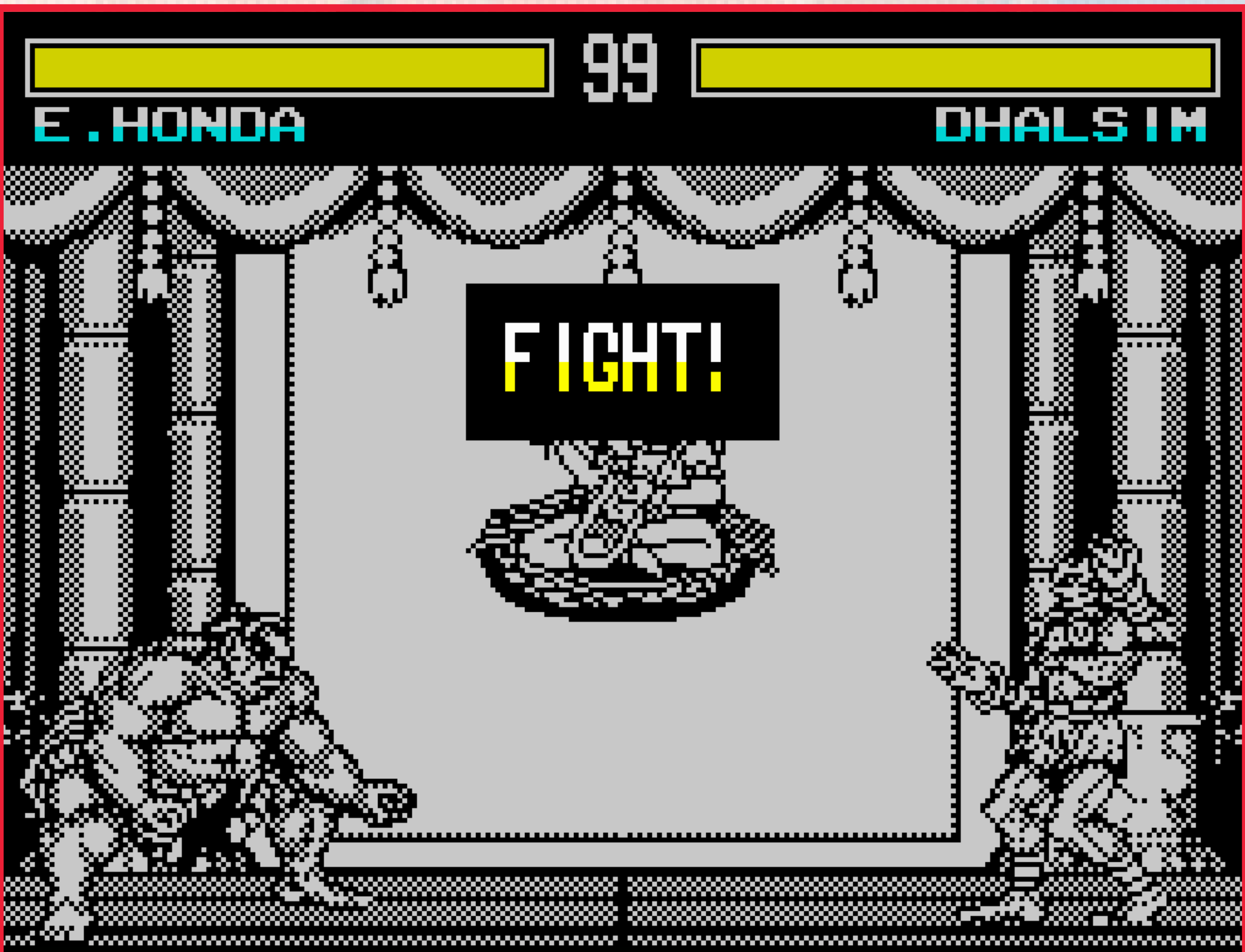
And so it was in the deepest, darkest days of 1993, that US Gold did cometh and say unto the Spec-chums, "oi, we've gone and done a Speccy version of that Street Fighter II that those SNES kids keep harping on about, stop whining". And the Spec-chums did rejoice, and wenteth to their local software boutique and parted withst their hard-earned and ran home with their cassettes to loadeth it up. And waited. And waited. And waited. And had their tea. And waited. And lo, finally it loaded, and they discovered that it was, in fact, absolute crap. And the SNES kids did laugh and point, and the Spec-chums wenteth to bed and cursed the name of US Gold (once more).

Which is a really long-winded way of saying that Street Fighter II is a game that no Spectrum fan ever expected to see running well on their beloved little 8-bit pal.

Sweet Fightin' +2 (no relation) is nothing short of a revelation. Yes, it still has the incredibly long-winded multi-load so really is not suitable for tape AT ALL, it shares most of its graphics with US Gold's original release, and it's not quite as fully-featured on the move set front as the arcade original or console ports, but literally everything else is absolutely spot on.

The music is there, and it's brilliant. The controls are stripped back but sensible and work really well. And the gameplay... well, where to start? It's fast, it's fluid, attacks connect with a force that you feel - I'm not just making a crap pun when I say it's 'punchy'. In fact, I don't think it's hyperbole to say this is the best a fighting game has ever felt on the Spectrum - it's that good. Hell, it beats all of the other home computer ports to a bloody pulp. Shoryuken!

Needless to say, you'll want to give this a go. Plug in your DivMMC or set your emulator to instant-load TAP files, gather up as many of your smug Commodore-owning friends as you can find, and spend an afternoon showing them how it can and should be done, 8-bit style. Because this is absolutely brilliant.



Little and Large didn't always see eye to eye.

In June 1992 SNES owners got to cock a snook at their Mega Drive owning pals with a slick conversion of the hottest arcade game around; Street Fighter 2. This carried on for a full year before Sega fans got a version of their own in the shape of Street Fighter II: Champion Edition.

Back then, a whole year seemed like an eternity for the console kids but Spec-chums are made of more patient stuff, forged in the fires of the multi-load. "One year? Pah! Hold my beer" we scream in unison as we waited patiently for three and a half decades. Sure we may have had US Gold's ambitious, but not very playable, port to tide us over. Now however, thanks to the coding wizard that is Presh, we have a SF2 to be proud of.

And what a conversion it is. Sweet Fightin' +2 is a full bells and whistles, no compromises, all characters present, all individual stages, packed with special moves, great tunes, great graphics, fluid fast movement and above all else hugely playable slug fest...it has the absolute works! This game is utterly incredible and I'll fight anyone that says otherwise, preferably at this immense game though, not IRL as I'm a softie.

The End

again

Happy Birthday to us!
Happy Birthday to us!
Happy Birthday dear Break Space!
Happy Birthday to us!

That's right : now we are 1, with our difficult second year underway.

38 reviews this quarter is 4 more than we had in Q1 2025, so things are continuing to look up for the Spectrum.

As always, we're eager to hear your thoughts so go ahead and email us at BreakSpaceInbox@gmail.com
Anything goes, just send it. Stop thinking about it, send it.

And we're always on the look-out for new Review Crew members and writers, artists and coders, so if you think you've got what it takes (and it doesn't take much) then get in touch!

It's easy and fun!

We're also on Bluesky as @breakspace.bsky.app
Issue 6 is on the way, in July.

Next Time :

More reviews!

And some Features, I expect.

Who knows?

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